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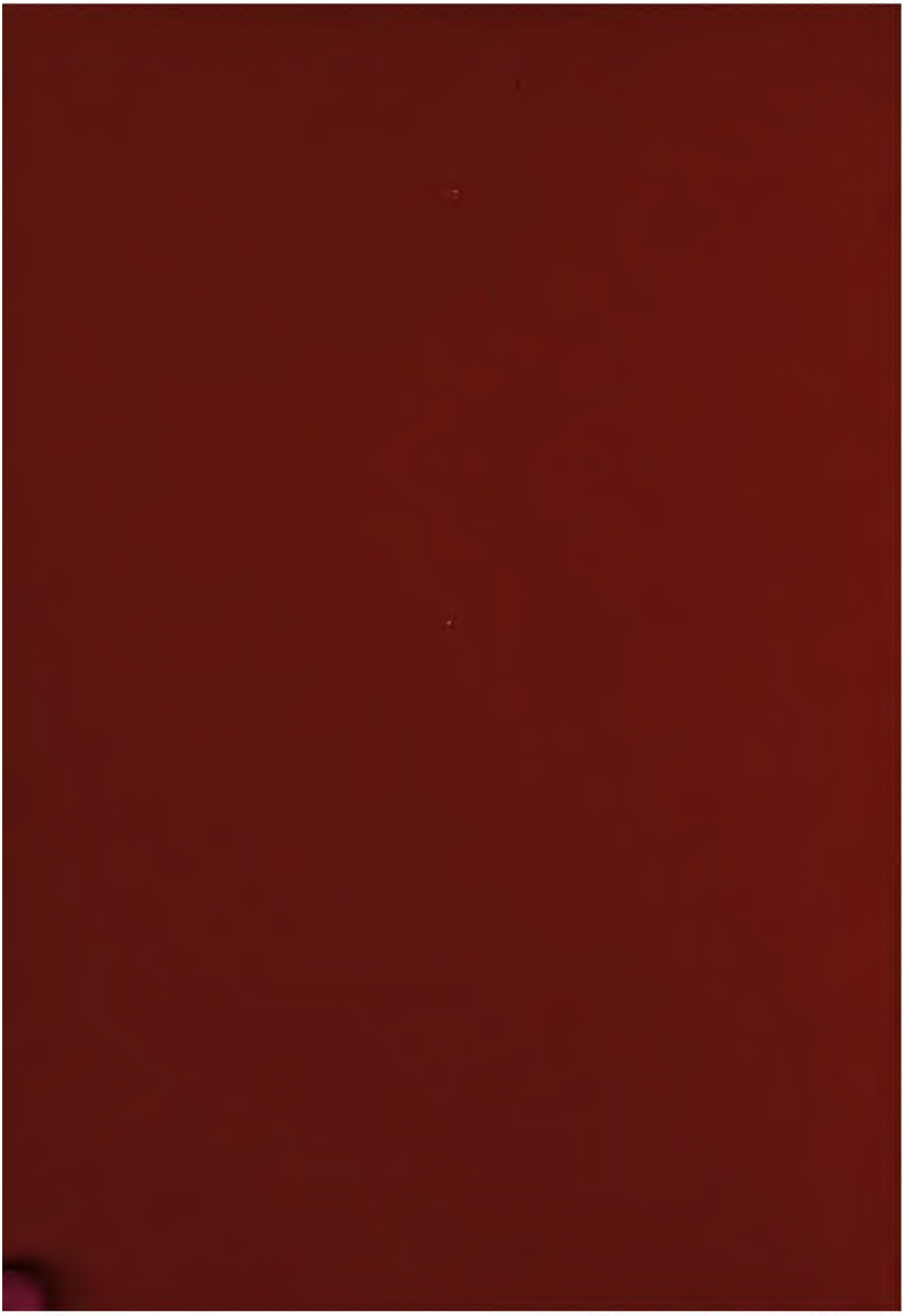

Christmas with the Poets

LONDON MDCCCLI

Christmas with the Poets:

A COLLECTION OF

SONGS, CAROLS, AND DESCRIPTIVE VERSES,

RELATING TO THE FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS,

FROM THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD TO THE PRESENT TIME.

EMBELLISHED

WITH FIFTY-THREE TINTED ILLUSTRATIONS BY BIRKET FOSTER,

AND WITH INITIAL LETTERS AND OTHER ORNAMENTS.

"This Book of Christmas should be a sound and good persuasion for gentlemen, and all wealthy men, to keep a good Christmas."—*A Ha! Christmas*, 1647.

LONDON:

DAVID BOGUE, 86, FLEET STREET,

MDCCCLII.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
M DCCC LII.

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SOME ingenious critic will probably discover that many of the verses in the present collection are unworthy to take rank as "poems," and will accordingly call the Editor to account for having in his selections departed from the strict letter of the title of his work. Following numerous illustrious examples, the Editor ventures to anticipate criticism—to the extent of pointing out the above inconsistency; excusing himself, however, at the same time, by stating that every Song, Carol, or Descriptive piece in the present collection, which does not merit the higher appellation of Poem, will be found to illustrate in some degree an interesting by-gone custom, or to describe some feature worth preserving, connected with the Christmas celebrations of past or present times. And he feels that, if he could justify all his other shortcomings as readily as he can the one in question, it will be conceded that he has performed his task in a far more perfect manner than he can now venture to lay claim to.

The Editor would here desire to state that it cannot but be gratifying to him to find that, in spite of the disadvantages under which the first edition of the present work made its appearance, a second impression has been called for. He believes that this can boast of various improvements; the most important of which are several new designs from the pencil of his talented friend, Mr. Birket Foster.

H. V.

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Gloria in Excelsis Deo:
Et in Terra Pax.

"PHŒBUS waxed old, and huéd like laton;
That in his hot declination
Shone as the burnéd gold, with streams bright,
But now in Capricorn adown doth light
Wherein he shone full pale, I dare well sain.
The bitter frosts with sleet and rain
Destroyed have the green in every yard.
Janus sits by the fire with double beard,
And drinketh of his bugle horn the wine!
Before him stands brawn of the tuskéd swine,
And NOWEL* crieth every lusty man."

THE FRANKLIN'S TALE.

DIVISION I.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS, FROM THE ANGLO-NORMAN PERIOD TO THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION.

FIVE hundred years ago, Chaucer, who, in his racy verse, has preserved the exactest descriptions of the manners of the age in which he lived, incidentally sketched the above slight picture of the Christmas season. Unfortunately, it furnishes us with but few points to dwell upon. The wintry sun no longer shining like burnished gold, and throwing out broad rays of light, but of a dull brazen hue; the bitter frosts, that with sleet and rain have destroyed the last vestiges of the garden's green; these, relieved by an incident allegorical of the jovial feasting which never failed to usher in the festival of the Saviour's nativity, comprise not only the whole of this little sketch, but all that the father of English poetry—the "morning star of Song"—has left us connected with our subject. It is not, therefore, by extracts from his works that we shall be enabled to illustrate the customs and festivities of the Christmas season among our forefathers at this early period of our history. The materials for this purpose will have to be culled from more fugitive sources, and will be mainly comprised of poems which were chaunted forth by the minstrels of old, at a time when a scanty measure of devotion furnished the excuse for the most extravagant revelry.

Among the primitive Christians, the festival of the Saviour's nativity was doubtless ushered in by the display of a calm, religious feeling, unmingled with the consideration of mere worldly enjoyments; but in course of time, when this important feast of the Christian

* The French word Noel, signifying Christmas.

Church had come to be incorporated with those heathen rites of the northern nations, which were celebrated towards the end of the year, it degenerated, for the most part, into a mere display of boisterous festivity. Such we find it to have been during the Anglo-Saxon period, and such it continued under the line of Norman kings; though one good feature connected with the celebration of the Christmas festival by these latter monarchs, was the practice that prevailed with them, of assembling upon the occasion the chief prelates and nobles of the kingdom, when the general affairs of the country were taken into consideration. As a relief, however, to these grave deliberations, the guests were feasted with a series of grand banquets; and one of the metrical romances of the period has the following allusion to the circumstance:—

"Christmas is a time full honest;
King Richard it honoured with great feast,
All his clerks and barons
Were set in their pavilions,
And served with great plenty
Of meat, and drink, and each dainty." *

And, in truth, the company were served with "meat and drink in great plenty;" for we find it recorded, that at several of the entertainments of the period, as many as thirty thousand dishes were set before the famished guests. Some of the "dainties" would perhaps be regarded as questionable by modern tastes; they may be judged of, however, by an enumeration of the favourite dishes of the period, which will be found contained in one of the Boar's Head Carols, a few pages further on. Days thus spent in feasting and deliberation gave place to nights of revelry, at which masques and mummings, varied with games of chance, and the tricks of jugglers and mountebanks, formed the chief features of the evening's entertainment. A continual round of pleasure was thus kept up throughout the whole of the twelve days forming the feast of Yule; and it was rarely, until the expiration of the closing night's debauch, that a time was found for the return to a more sober course of proceeding.

The earliest existing Carol known to antiquaries, is in the Anglo-Norman language. It was discovered written on a blank leaf in the middle of one of the manuscripts† preserved in the British Museum. The date assigned to it is the thirteenth century. As but few of our readers would readily comprehend a reprint of the poem in its present form, we have preferred to insert a new translation of it, wherein the style and language of the original have been very closely adhered to. We may suppose this Carol to have been one of those in use among the bands of professional minstrels—half vagrants, half troubadours, who wandered from one to the other of the different castles of the Norman nobility, "discoursing sweet sounds" for the gratification of the assembled guests, and who were certain of a ready welcome on so jovial an occasion, as the celebration of the Christmas feast.

* Richard Cœur de Lion, in Weber's Metrical Romances.
† Bibl. Reg. 16, E. VIII.

Anglo Norman Carol.

LORDINGS, listen to our lay—
We have come from far away
To seek Christmas;
In this mansion we are told
He his yearly feast doth hold:

'T is to day!
May joy come from God above,
To all those who Christmas love!

Lordings, I now tell you true,
Christmas bringeth unto you
Only mirth;
His house he fills with many a dish
Of bread and meat and also fish,
To grace the day.
May joy come from God above,
To all those who Christmas love.

Lordings, through our army's band
They say—who spends with open hand
Free and fast,
And oft regales his many friends—
God gives him double what he spends,
To grace the day.
May joy come from God above,
To all those who Christmas love.

Lordings, wicked men eschew,
In them never shall you view
Aught that 's good;
Cowards are the rabble rout,
Kick and beat the grumblers out,
To grace the day.
May joys come from God above,
To all those who Christmas love.

To English ale, and Gascon wine,
And French, doth Christmas much incline—
And Anjou's, too;

He makes his neighbour freely drink,
So that in sleep his head doth sink
Often by day.
May joys flow from God above,
To all those who Christmas love.

Lords, by Christmas and the host
Of this mansion hear my toast—
Drink it well—
Each must drain his cup of wine,
And I the first will toss off mine:
Thus I advise,
Here then I bid you all *Wassail*,
Cursed be who will not say *Drinkhail*.*

The following very early Carols, with their mixture of Scriptural allusions and invitations to hard drinking, are such as were doubtless sung by the tribe of professional minstrels during the several periods of feasting into which the day of Yule was divided. A peculiar instance, showing, that even in a subsequent age, music and singing were held in greater account than devotion, and that eating and drinking were rated far above all, is found in the accounts of the Stationers' Company for the year 1510, which contain the following entry:—

	s.	*d.*
Item payd to the preacher	vi	2
Item payd to the minstrell	xii	0
Item payd to the coke	xv	0

The first of the two following Carols is omong the additional MSS. in the British Museum.† The other will be found in the Sloane MSS.‡ Ritson considers this latter manuscript to be of the time of Henry VI.; but in all probability the Carols themselves belong to a considerably earlier date. In the original version of the first Carol, some of the phrases are in French; these have been translated, and the spelling has been modernised in both instances, for it was so corrupt, and the abbreviations were so numerous, that, had they been followed, the Carols could only have been deciphered with considerable labour.

* Wassail and Drinkhail are both derived from the Anglo-Saxon. They were the common drinking pledges of the age. Wassail is equivalent to the phrase, "Your health," of the present day. Drinkhail, which literally signifies "drink health," was the usual acknowledgment of the other pledge.

† No. 5665, fol. 6, vo. ‡ No. 2593, fol. 79, ro.

SIR CHRISTMAS.

NOWEL, Nowel, Nowel, Nowel,
Who is there, that singeth so, Nowel,
Nowel, Nowel?

I am here, Sir Christmas,
Welcome my lord Sir Christmas,
Welcome to all both more and less;*
Come near Nowel.

God be with you, Sir, tidings I you bring,
A maid hath born a child full young,
The which causeth me to sing,
Nowel.

Christ is now born of a pure maid,
In an ox stall he is laid,
Wherefore sing we all at abraid,†
Nowel.

* Great and small. † Suddenly, or loudly.

Drink you all right heartily,
Make good cheer and be right merry,
And sing with us now joyfully,
Nowel.

WELCOME YULE.

Welcome be thou heavenly King,
Welcome, born on this morning,
Welcome, for whom we shall sing
Welcome Yule.*

Welcome be ye Stephen and John,
Welcome Innocents every one,
Welcome Thomas Martyr one,
Welcome Yule.

Welcome be ye good New Year,
Welcome Twelfth day both in fere,†
Welcome Saints loved and dear,
Welcome Yule.

Welcome be ye Candlemass,
Welcome be ye Queen of bliss
Welcome both to more and less,‡
Welcome Yule.

Welcome be ye that are here,
Welcome all, and make good cheer,
Welcome all, another year,
Welcome Yule.

* Yule is the Anglo-Saxon for Christmas. † In company. ‡ Great and small.

Religious Carols.

THE three subsequent poems are, perhaps, the best specimens that could be selected of the religious Carols of the fifteenth century, so far as these have been preserved in the manuscripts of the period, for we fancy that more of the hand of the poet than of the monk may be recognised in their composition. In the last of the series there is a gracefulness and tenderness in many of the touches, not often met with in poems of this early date. No further liberties have been taken with them, beyond the modernizing of the spelling, and some occasional transpositions, with here and there the substitution of a modern word for one of obsolete character, except in the case of the first poem, which has been perfected from two different versions existing in contemporary manuscripts; one belonging to the Harleian collection,* the other in the possession of Thomas Wright, Esq., who has reprinted both versions in works edited by him for the Percy Society.† A third copy of this Carol, with numerous variations, may be seen among the Sloane MSS.

THE THREE KINGS.

NOW is the time of Christmas come,
Together joined are Father and Son,
And with the Holy Ghost are one,
In fere-a,
God send us a good new year-a.

I would now sing, if that I might,
Of a child so fair to sight
A maiden bare this winter's night,
So still-a;
And as it was his will-a.

There came three kings from Galilee
To Bethlehem, that fair citie,
To seek him that should ever be,
By right-a,
Lord, and king, and knight-a.

* No. 541, fol. 414, ro.

† Christmas Carols, 1841. Songs and Carols, 1847.

As they went forth with their offering,
They met Herod, that moody king,
He askéd them of their coming
That way-a;
And thus to them 'gan say-a:—

"From whence come ye, you kings three?"
"Out of the East, as you may see,
To seek him that should ever be,
By right-a,
Lord, and king, and knight-a."

"When you to this child have been,
Come you home this way again,
And tell me all that ye have seen,
I pray-a;
Go not another way-a."

Then of Herod, that moody king,
They took their leave both old and young,
And forth they went with their offering,
By light-a
Of the star that shone so bright-a,

Till they came to that blissful place
Where Jesus and his mother was;
There they offered with great solace,
In fere-a,
Gold, incense, and myrrh-a.

When they had their offering made,
As the Holy Ghost them bade,
Then were they both merry and glad,
And light-a;
It was a good fair sight-a.

Anon, as on their way they went,
The Father of heaven an angel sent
To those three kings that made present
That day-a,
Who thus to them did say-a:—

"My Lord doth warn you every one,
By King Herod ye go not home,
For if you do you will be slain
Full soon-a,
And woe to you be done-a."

So forth they went another way,
Through the might of God, his lay,
As the angel to them did say
Full right-a;
It was a good fair sight-a.

When they were come to their countree,
Merry and glad they were all three
Of the sight that they did see
By night-a,
By the star's shining light-a.

Kneel we now all here a-down
To that Lord of great renown,
And pray we in good devotion
For grace-a,
In Heaven to have a place-a.

"IN EXCELSIS GLORIA."

This Carol is from the Harleian MSS. in the British Museum.* The date of the manuscript is supposed to be about the year 1500.

WHEN Christ was born of Mary free,
In Bethlehem, in that fair citie,
Angels sang there with mirth and glee,
In Excelsis Gloria!

Herdsmen beheld these angels bright,
To them appearing with great light,
Who said, "God's Son is born this night,"
In Excelsis Gloria!

This King is come to save mankind,
As in Scripture truths we find,
Therefore this song have we in mind,
In Excelsis Gloria!

Then, dear Lord, for thy great grace,
Grant us the bliss to see thy face,
That we may sing to thy solace,
In Excelsis Gloria!

* No. 5396, fol. 4, ro.

[illegible] (CELLI)

[illegible] from the [illegible] of the ancient [illegible] Thomas Vaughan, Esq. Another version [illegible] permitted from a MS. in the [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[

Now, sweet son, since thou art king, why art thou laid in stall?
Why not thou ordain thy bedding in some great king's hall?
Me thinketh 't is right
That king or knight
Should be in good array;
And then among
It were no wrong
To sing, by by, lullay.

Mary, mother, I am thy child, though I be laid in stall,
Lords and dukes shall worship me, and so shall kings all;
Ye shall well see
That kings three
Shall come on the twelfth day;*
For this behest
Give me thy breast,
And sing, by by, lullay.

Now, tell me, sweet son, I thee pray, thou art my love and dear,
How should I keep thee to thy pay,* and make thee glad of cheer;
For all thy will
I would fulfil
Thou knowest full well in fay,†
And for all this,
I will thee kiss,
And sing, by by, lullay.

My dear mother, when time it be, take thou me up aloft,
And set me upon thy knee, and handle me full soft;

* Satisfaction. † In truth.

And in thy arm
Thou wilt me warm,
And keep me night and day;
If I should weep
And may not sleep,
Thou sing, by by, lullay.

Now, sweet son, since it is so, all things are at thy will,
I pray thee grant to me a boon, if it be right and skill,*
That child or man,
That will or can,
Be merry upon my day;
To bliss them bring,
And I shall sing
Lullay, by by, lullay.

* Reasonable.

Boar's Head Carols.

"THE season of the Boar is from the Nativity
Till the Purification of our Lady so free.
For at the nativity of our Lady sweet,
He may find where he goeth under his feet,
Both in woods and fields, corn and other fruit,
When he after food maketh any suit:
Crabs and oak corns and nuts there they grow,
Haws and hips and other things enow,
That till the Purification lasteth as ye see,
And maketh the boar in season to be;
For while that fruit may last,
His time is never past."

THE BOOK OF ST ALBANS, 1460.

THERE is no more interesting, and, by the way, no more hacknied, feature connected with the celebration of Christmas in the olden time, than the custom of bringing in the Boar's Head with minstrelsy. The Carol for this purpose, discovered on the solitary leaf remaining of a

volume of Christmas Carols, printed by Wynkin de Worde, has, since first brought to light, been printed and reprinted in every account of Christmas with which we are familiar. And certainly there is something very picturesque in the incident itself, as well as honour, we may presume, attaching to those who took part in it, for we find that Henry II., at the coronation of his eldest son, "served him at the table as sewer,* bringing up the boar's head with trumpets before it, according to the manner." †

The five subsequent Carols have in their day played their part, times without number, in this ceremony; and on the very occasion above referred to, there is no doubt but that one or the other of them was chaunted forth between the flourishes of the herald's trumpets, when the proud Plantagenet did duty as sewer to his rebellious son. It is not merely at regal banquets, however, that these Carols have been in request. The boar's head was the first dish served up at table in every baronial hall throughout the country at the Christmas feast; and on such occasions we may be certain there was no lack of amateur or professional minstrels to do becoming honour to a ceremony of so much importance. In all of the following Carols, the old spelling has been modernised, and other trifling liberties have been taken, to render the text intelligible.

I.

(From Mr. T. Wright's manuscript.)

IDINGS I bring you for to tell
What in wild forest me befel,
When I in with a wild beast fell,
With a boar so bryme.‡

A boar so bryme that me pursued,
Me for to kill so sharply moved,
That brymly beast so cruel and rude,
There tamed I him,
And reft from him both life and limb.

Truly, to show you this is true,
His head I with my sword did hew,
To make this day new mirth for you—
Now eat thereof anon.

* The officer who placed and removed the various dishes.
† Holinshed's Chron. ‡ Fierce.

Eat, and much good do it you;
Take you bread and mustard thereto.
Joy with me that this I have done,
I pray you be glad every one,
And all rejoice as one.

II.

(From a manuscript in the British Museum.*)

NOWEL, Nowel, Nowel, Nowel,
Tidings good I think to tell.

The boar's head, that we bring here,
Betokeneth a prince without peer
Is born to-day to buy us dear,
Nowel.

* MS. Addit., No. 5665, fol. 3. 10.

The boar he is a sovereign beast,
And acceptable at every feast;
So might this lord be to greatest and least;
Nowel.

This boar's head we bring with song,
In worship of Him that thus sprung
From a virgin to redress all wrong;
Nowel.

III.

(From Mr. Wright's manuscript.)

At the beginning of the meat
Of a boar's head ye shall eat,
And in the mustard ye shall whet;
And ye shall sing before ye go.

Welcome be ye that are here,
Ye shall all have right good cheer,
And also a right good fare;
And ye shall sing before ye go.

Welcome be ye every one,
For ye shall sing all right anon;
Hey! you sure that ye have done?
And ye shall sing before ye go.

The following is perhaps the most ancient of all the Boar's Head Carols. It is preserved in a manuscript of the fifteenth century, and was first printed in the "Reliquiæ Antiquæ," to which publication it was communicated by Sir Frederic Madden. The second part of this old Carol furnishes us with a minute description of the viands that formed the second course at a Christmas feast. They certainly make some amends for the poverty of the first portion of the banquet, and we may presume that when these dishes were served up the dinner commenced in good earnest. In spite of the invitations contained in these Carols to partake of the "first mess," the Boar's Head, we anticipate, was little

else but a show dish; for, in all of the illusions to it, mention is only made of one head being served at each feast, though, even were the number greater, it could hardly have been sufficient to have yielded a mouthful a-piece to the numerous guests who were generally present at these entertainments. Between the courses the minstrels played and sang—the jesters discharged their smartest jokes, and practised their most extravagant antics; and, we dare say the famous Dance of Fools was not unfrequently performed at this particular juncture, before the attention of the guests was directed to the more exciting business which was so soon to follow.

IV.

HEY! Hey! Hey! Hey!
The boar's head is armèd gay.

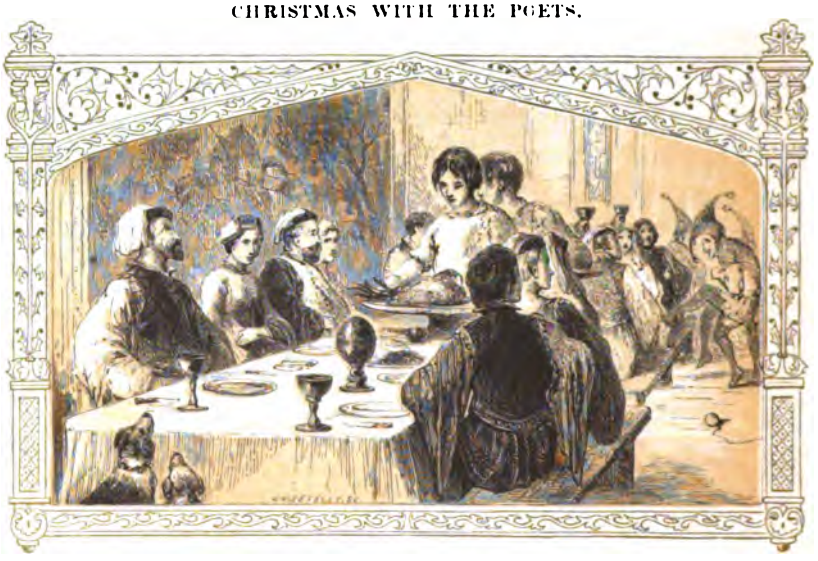
THE boar's head in hand I bring,
With garlands gay encirling,*
I pray you all with me to sing,
With Hey!

Lords, knights, and squires,
Parsons, priests, and vicars,
The boar's head is the first mess,†
With Hey!

The boar's head, as I now say,
Takes its leave and goes away,
Goeth after the Twelfth day,
With Hey!

Then comes in the second course with great pride,
The cranes, the herons, the bitterns, by their side,
The partridges, the plovers, the woodcocks, and the snipe,
Larks in hot show, for the ladies to pick,
Good drink also, luscious and fine,
Blood of Allemaine, romnay, and wine,
With Hey!

* "Porttoryng" in the original -a word not explained in any glossary.
† That is, "the first dish."



Good brewed ale and wine, I dare well say,
The boar's head with mustard armed so gay,
Furmity for pottage, and venison fine,
And the umbles of the doe and all that ever comes in.
Capons well baked, with knuckles of the roe,
Raisons and currants, and other spices too,
With Hey!

The following is the Carol previously referred to as having been preserved on a single leaf of a book of Carols, printed by Wynkin de Worde. It is there entitled, "A Carol, brynging in the Bore's Head." The first verse is evidently a mere variation of that in the preceding song.

V.

Caput Apri defero
Reddens laudes Domino.

THE boar's head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary;
I pray you all sing merrily,
Qui estis in convivio.

The boar's head, I understand,
Is the chief service in this land;
Look wherever it be found,
Servite cum cantico,

Be glad, lords, both more or less,
For this hath ordained our steward
To cheer you all this Christmas,
The boar's head with mustard.

On the other side of the leaf of Wynkin de Worde's volume is the following Carol, which, although apparently unconnected with our subject, we introduce as one of a class of songs usually sung during the Christmas season. That, in its own day, it was regarded as an undoubted Christmas Carol, is evident from the circumstance of its finding a place amongst Wynkin de Worde's collection, as the leaf which has been preserved, and which is the last of the book, bears the following imprint:—"Thus endeth the Christmasse Carroles, newly enprinted at Londō, in fletestrete at the signe of the sonne by Wynkin de Worde. The yere of our lorde, M.D.XXI."

A CAROL OF HUNTING.

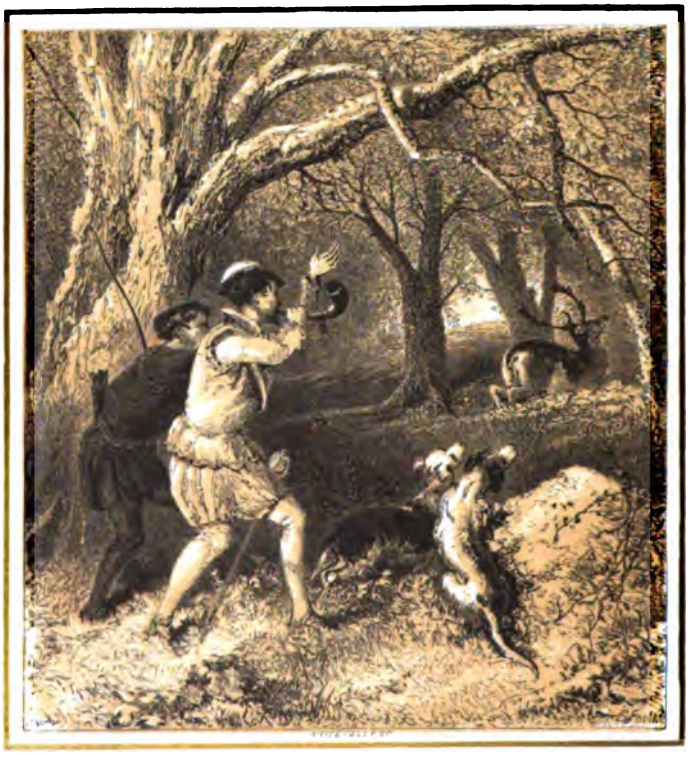
As I came by a green forest side,
I met with a forester that bade me abide,
Whey go bet, hey go bet, hey go how,
We shall have sport and game enow.

Underneath a tree I did me set,
And with a great hart anon I met,
I bade let slip, and say hey go bet,
With hey go bet, hey go bet how,
We shall have sport and game enow.

I had not stand there but a while,
Not the mountenaunce* of a mile,

* The meaning of this phrase, as used in the present instance, appears to be, "not the time it would occupy to travel a mile."

There came a great hart without guile.
There he goeth, there he goeth,
With hey go bet, hey go bet how,
We shall have sport and game enow.



Talbot my hound, with a merry taste,
All about the green wood he gan cast,
I took my horn and blew him a blast
With tro, ro, ro, ro: tro, ro, ro, ro:
With hey go bet, hey go bet how,
We shall have sport and game enow.
There he goeth, there he goeth,
With hey go bet, hey go bet how,
We shall have sport and game enow.

Carols in Praise of Ale.

DURING the continuance of the Christmas banquet, there is no doubt but that a class of Carols were sung, either by the assembled company or by the attendant minstrels, having, for their subject matter, neither reference to the religious origin of the festival, nor to any of the particular ceremonies connected therewith. The following racy drinking songs we may presume to have been of the number, and doubtless they have oftentimes been chaunted forth from the stentorian lungs of many a jovial tippling crew, during the pauses which took place in the serving of the feast. The first one is taken from a manuscript of the commencement of the sixteenth century in the British Museum,* and is there intituled, "A Christenmesse Carroll." The others have been extracted from the reprint by Mr. Wright, of the ancient manuscript in his own possession, before alluded to.

I.

A BONE, God wot!
Sticks in my throat—
Without I have a draught
Of cornie ale,
Nappy and stale,
My life lies in great waste.
Some ale or beer,
Gentle butler,
Some liquor thou us show,
Such as you mash
Our throats to wash,
The best were that you brew.

* MS. Cott. Vesp. A, xxv., fol. 168, vo.

Saint, master, and knight,
That Saint Malt hight,
Were pressed between two stones;
The sweet humour
Of his liquor
Would make us sing at once.
Master Wortley,
I dare well say,
I tell you as I think,
Would not, I say,
Bid us this day,
But that we should have drink.

His men so tall
Walk up his hall,
With many a comely dish;
Of his good meat
I cannot eat,
Without I drink, I wis.
Now give us drink,
And let cat wink,
I tell you all at once,
It sticks so sore,
I may sing no more,
Till I have drunken once.

II.

RING us in good ale, and bring us in good ale;
For our blessed Lady's sake, bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no brown bread, for that is made of bran;
Nor bring us in no white bread, for that is only grain;
But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no beef, for there are many bones;
But bring us in good ale, for that goes down at once;
Then bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no bacon, for that is passing fat;
But bring us in good ale, and give us enough of that;
So bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no mutton, for that is often lean;
Nor bring us in no tripes, for they be seldom clean;
But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no eggs, for there be many shells;
But bring us in good ale, and give us nothing else;
Then bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no butter, for therein are many hairs;
Nor bring us in no pig's flesh, for that will make us boars;
But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no puddings, for they're not over good;
Nor bring us in no venison, for that suits not our blood;
But bring us in good ale.

Bring us in no capon's flesh, for that is often dear;
Nor bring us in no ducks' flesh, for they slobber in the mere;
But bring us in good ale.

Good ale, however, like most other things when taken in excess, is attended by certain inconveniences, as the following song, which forms an appropriate moral to the two preceding ones, will serve to explain.

ALE makes many a man to stick at a brier;
Ale makes many a man to lie in the mire;
And ale makes many a man to sleep by the fire—
With dole.*

Ale makes many a man to stumble at a stone;
Ale makes many a man to go drunken home;
And ale makes many a man to break his bone—
With dole.

Ale makes many a man to draw his knife;
Ale makes many a man to cause great strife;
And ale makes many a man to beat his wife—
With dole.

Ale makes many a man to wet his cheeks;
Ale makes many a man to lie in the streets;
And ale makes many a man to perform strange feats—
With dole.

Ale makes many a man to stumble at the blocks;†
Ale makes many a man to give his head hard knocks;
And ale makes many a man to sit in the stocks—
With dole.

Ale makes many a man reel over the fallows;
Ale makes many a man to swear by God and All-hallows;
And ale makes many a man to hang upon the gallows—
With dole.

* Grief.

† Probably alluding to the "horse blocks," or "mounting stones," then common in every market-place, and at the door of every ale-house.

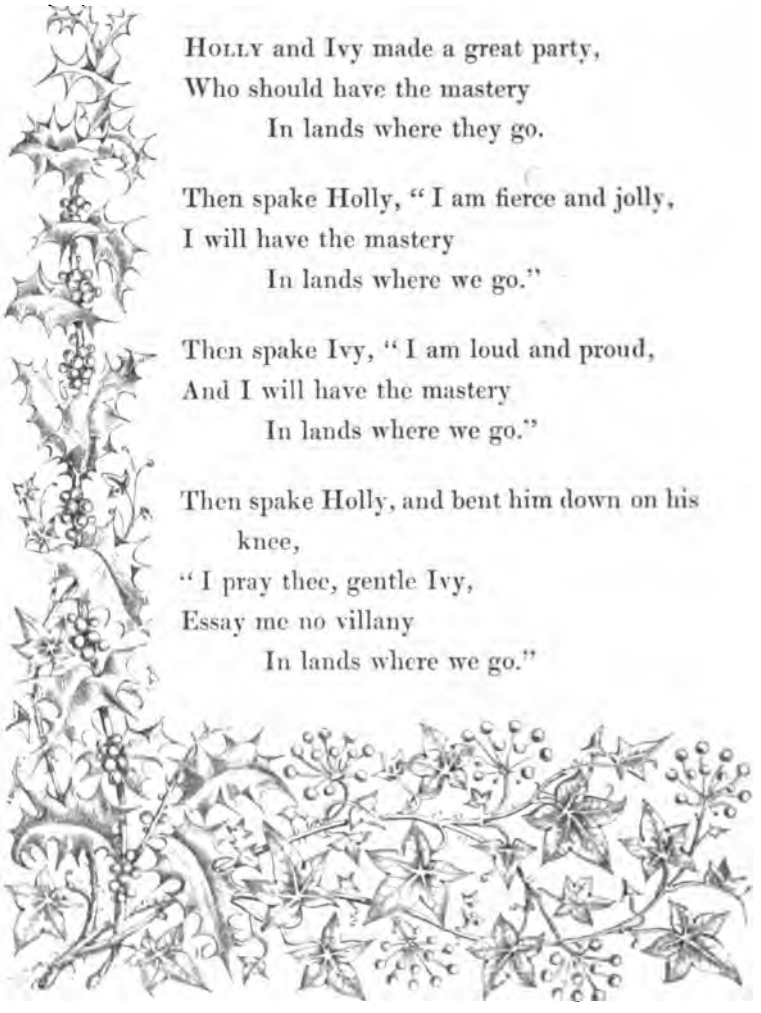
Carols in Praise of the Holly or the Ivy.

THE custom of decking houses and churches with evergreens towards the close of the year, appears to be of very ancient date, it being, in fact, one of those remnants of Paganism, which, although forbidden by the councils of the early Christian Church, had obtained too great a hold on the prejudices of the people to be readily relinquished, as its transmission down to the present day serves to prove. In this country there is no doubt but that the Holly and the Ivy have been the favourite evergreens used for the above purpose; still we are not acquainted with any allusion to their being thus employed prior to the date of the following Carols, which may be considered to belong to the fifteenth century. Stow, in his survey, speaking of the middle of this century, says, "Against the feast of Christmas every man's house, and also the parish churches, were decked with holm (holly), ivy, bays, and whatsoever the season of the year afforded to be green. The conduits and standards in the streets were likewise garnished." It is curious that the Mistletoe, the sacred plant of the Druids, which, as a Christmas evergreen, ranks at the present day of equal importance with the Holly itself, is never alluded to in connection with the Christmas season until the middle of the seventeenth century.

The following Carols relating to the Holly and the Ivy convey the idea that these two favourite Christmas evergreens had each their partizans, who espoused their several causes as warmly as they supported the claims of the rival houses of York and Lancaster, whose struggle for pre-eminence was waging at the time these Carols were at the height of their popularity.

Nos. I., III., and IV. have been taken from the reprint of Mr. Wright's ancient manuscript. No. II. is from the Harleian MSS. (No. 5395.)

I.



HOLLY and Ivy made a great party,
Who should have the mastery
In lands where they go.

Then spake Holly, "I am fierce and jolly,
I will have the mastery
In lands where we go."

Then spake Ivy, "I am loud and proud,
And I will have the mastery
In lands where we go."

Then spake Holly, and bent him down on his knee,
"I pray thee, gentle Ivy,
Essay me no villany
In lands where we go."

The next Carol has evidently some connection with the preceding one, and was most likely written and sung in the nature of a reply to it. It is conjectured, from the second stanza, that the Ivy was not used for the internal decoration of the houses of our forefathers, but we think this conclusion has been come to without sufficient reason. Probably the expression, "Ivy stands without the door," is merely in allusion to the custom of the Ivy being used as a vintner's sign.

II.

NAY, Ivy, nay, it shall not be, I wis,
Let Holly have the mastery as the manner is.

Holly standeth in the hall fair to behold,
Ivy stands without the door; she is full sore a cold.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Holly and his merry men, they dance now and they sing;
Ivy and her maidens, they weep, and their hands wring.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Ivy hath a lybe,* she caught it with the cold,
So may they all have, that do with Ivy hold.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Holly he hath berries, as red as any rose,
The foresters, the hunters, keep them from the does.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Ivy she hath berries as black as any sloe,
There come the owls and eat them as they go.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Holly he hath birds a full fair flock,
The nightingale, the poppinjay, the gentle laverock.
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

Good Ivy, say to us, what birds hast thou,
None but the owlet that cries How! How!
Nay, Ivy, nay, &c.

* This word is not explained in any glossary.

III.

HERE comes Holly, that is so gent,*
To please all men is his intent.
Alleluia!

But Lord and Lady of this hall,
Whosoever against Holly call.
Alleluia!

Whosoever against Holly doth cry,
In a lepe† he shall hang full high.
Alleluia!

Whosoever against Holly doth sing,
He may weep and his hands wring.
Alleluia!

IV.

IVY, chief of trees it is
Veni coronaberis.

The most worthy is she in town;
He who says other, says amiss;
Worthy is she to bear the crown;
Veni coronaberis.

Ivy is soft, and meek of speech,
Against all woe she bringeth bliss;
Happy is he that may her reach;
Veni coronaberis.

* Gallant, courteous. † A large fruit basket.

Ivy is green, of colour bright,
Of all trees the chief she is;
And that I prove will now be right;
Veni coronaberis.

Ivy, she beareth berries black;
God grant to all of us His bliss!
For then we shall nothing lack;
Veni coronaberis.

Superstitions regarding Christmas Day.

THE following poems are, perhaps, more curious than interesting. They afford, however, some idea of the superstitious dread with which the advent of Christmas Day must have been regarded in these early times, not merely by the vulgar, but by all classes of our forefathers, for the Francis Moores and Raphaels of the fifteenth century found even kings willing believers in their extravagant predictions. From the allusion in each verse of the first poem to the risks that those who steal subject themselves to, one would almost suppose thieving to have been the fashionable vice of the age, practised alike by both rich and poor, and that there was great need of such injunctions against it.

Both of these poems are from the same Harleian MS. in the British Museum.*

I.

ORDINGS, all of you I warn,
If the day that Christ was born
Fall upon a Sunday,
The winter shall be good, I say,
But great winds aloft shall be;
The summer shall be fair and dry.

* No. 2252, fols. 153-4, vo.

By kind skill and without loss,
Through all lands there shall be peace,
Good time for all things to be done,
But he that stealeth shall be found soon;
What child that day born may be,
A great lord he shall live to be.

If Christmas day on Monday be,
A great winter that year you 'll see,
And full of winds, both loud and shrill;
But in the summer, truth to tell,
Stern winds shall there be and strong,
Full of tempests lasting long;
While battles they shall multiply;
And great plenty of beasts shall die.
They that be born that day I ween,
They shall be strong each one and keen;
He shall be found that stealeth aught;
Though thou be sick thou diest not.

If Christmas day on Tuesday be,
That year shall many women die,
And that winter grow great marvels;
Ships shall be in great perils;
That year shall kings and lords be slain,
And many other people near them.
A dry summer that year shall be,
As all that are born therein may see;
They shall be strong and covetous.
If thou steal aught, thou losest thy life,
For thou shalt die through sword or knife;
But if thou fall sick, 't is certain,
Thou shalt turn to life again.

If Christmas day, the truth to say,
Fall upon a Wednesday,
There shall be a hard winter and strong,
With many hideous winds among.

The summer merry and good shall be,
And that year wheat in great plenty;
Young folk shall die that year also,
And ships at sea shall have great woe.
Whatever child that day born is,
He shall be doughty and gay, I wis.

And wise and crafty also of deed,
And find many in clothes and bread.

If Christmas day on Thursday be,
A windy winter you shall see;
Windy weather in each week,
And hard tempests strong and thick.
The summer shall be good and dry,
Corn and beasts shall multiply;
That year is good lands for to till;
Kings and princes shall die by skill.
If a child that day born should be,
It shall happen right well for thee—
Of deeds he shall be good and stable,
Wise of speech and reasonable.
Whoso that day goes thieving about,
He shall be punished without doubt;
And if sickness that day betide,
It shall quickly from thee glide.

If Christmas day on a Friday be,
The first of winter hard shall be,
With frost and snow and with great flood,
But the end thereof it shall be good.
Again, the summer shall be good also;
Folk in their eyes shall have great woe;
Women with child, beasts, and corn
Shall multiply, and be lost none.
The child that is born on that day,
Shall live long, and lecherous be alway.
Who stealeth ought shall be found out,
If thou be sick it lasteth not.

If Christmas day on Saturday fall,
That winter's to be dreaded by all;
It shall be so full of great tempest,
That it shall slay both man and beast;
Great store shall fail of fruit and corn,
And old folk die many a one.
What woman that day of child doth travel,
She shall give birth in great peril;
And children born that day, by faith,
In half a year shall meet with death.
The summer shall be wet and ill;
Thou shalt suffer if thou aught steal;
Thou diest if sickness do thee take.

II.

IF Christmas day on the Sunday be,
A troublous winter ye shall see,
Mingled with waters strong;
Good there shall be without fable,
For the summer shall be reasonable,
With storms at times among.

Wines that year shall all be good,
The harvest shall be wet with flood,
Pestilence fall on many a country;

Ere that sickness shall have past,
And while great tempests last,
Many young people dead shall be.

Princes that year with iron shall die,
There shall be changing of many lords high,
Amongst knights great debate,
Many tidings shall come to men,
Many wives shall be weeping then,
Both of poor and great estate.

The faith shall then be hurt truly,
For divers points of heresy
That shall then appear,
Through the tempting of the fiend,
And divers matters unkind
Shall bring great danger near.

Cattle shall thrive, one and the other,
Save oxen, they shall kill each other;
And some beasts they shall die;
Both fruit and corn will not be good,
Apples will be scarce for food,
And ships shall suffer on the sea.

That year on Monday, without fearing
All things well thou may'st begin,
They shall be profitable;
Children that on this day are born,
I'faith shall mighty be and strong,
Of wit full reasonable.

"GET Ivy and Holly and deck up thine house,
And take this same brawn to seethe and to souse.
Provide us good cheer, for thou know'st the old guise:
Old customs, that good be, let no man despise.
At Christmas be merry and thankful withal,
And feast thy poor neighbours, the great with the small,
Yea, all the year long, to the poor let us give:
God's blessing to follow us while we do live."

TUSSER.

DIVISION II.

CHRISTMAS POEMS OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA.

WE now enter upon that era which was a period of transition, not merely as regards our national religion, but likewise as regards our national literature. The Reformation, and the introduction of printing had begun to produce their fruits, and, amongst other changes that were taking place, somewhat of the barbarism of our national manners, was in process of eradication. And it was fitting that such should be the case under the auspices of a female sovereign, who, although she possessed but little of the gentleness of her sex, yet brought her influence to bear in refining the manners of her courtiers, and with no other object beyond the gratification of her own vanity, converted them into so many *beaux chevaliers*, who did homage to her person, more perhaps because she was a woman, than by reason of her position as a queen. Among the many changes that were effected, none were, perhaps, more apparent than in the festive entertainments of the time. Some idea of the ceremony observed on these occasions may be formed from the following code of instructions for the guidance of a nobleman's household:—

"On Christmas day, service in the church ended, the gentlemen presently repair into the hall to breakfast, with brawn, mustard, and malmsey.

"At dinner, the butler, appointed for the Christmas, is to see the tables covered and furnished; and the ordinary butlers of the house are decently to set bread, napkins, and trenchers, in good form, at every table; with spoons and knives. At the first course is served in a fair and large boar's head, upon a silver platter, with minstrelsy.

"Two 'servants' are to attend at supper, and to bear two fair torches of

wax, next before the musicians and trumpeters, and stand above the fire with the music, till the first course be served in through the hall. Which performed, they, with the music, are to return into the buttery. The like course is to be observed in all things, during the time of Christmas.

"At night, before supper, are revels and dancing, and so also after supper, during the twelve days of Christmas. The Master of the Revels is, after dinner and supper, to sing a carol, or song; and command other gentlemen then there present to sing with him and the company; and see it is very decently performed."

A recent writer, deriving his information from contemporary sources, furnishes us with some additional particulars in reference to the style of entertainment in vogue among the higher orders during the Elizabethan period. "The nobility," he says, "had discarded entirely their huge joints of salted beef, and platters of wood and pewter, together with the swarms of jesters, tumblers, and harpers, that formerly had been indispensable to the banquet-room; a stately ceremonial and solemn silence were considered to be the indications of true politeness. The table was daily set out with a great variety of dishes, consisting of beef, mutton, veal, lamb, pork, kid, coney, capon, pig, or so many of these as the season afforded, with store of red or fallow deer, and varieties of fish and fowl. The wine and other liqueurs were not placed upon the table with the dishes, but on a sideboard, and each person called, as occasion required, for a flagon of the wine he preferred; by which, as Harrison informs us, much idle tippling was avoided. When the company had finished eating, the remaining provisions were sent to the waiters and servants; and when these had sufficiently dined, the fragments were distributed among the poor, who waited without the gate."

None suffered so much from these innovations as the once highly rewarded minstrel, he, who had been in past times the soul of the tournament, and a welcome guest at every banquet, was now "a street ballad-singer, or alehouse fiddler, chaunting forth from benches and barrel heads to an audience consisting of a few gaping rustics from the country, or a parcel of idle boys; and, as if the degradation of these despised and unhoused favourites of former days had not been enough, the stern justice of the law made them doubly vile, obliging them to skulk into corners, and perform their merry offices in fear and trembling. Minstrels were now classed in the statute with rogues and vagabonds, and made liable to the same pains and penalties."

One distinguishing feature of the Christmas festivities of this era was the custom, which, originating in the reign of Henry VII., was now at its height, of appointing a Lord of Misrule or Master of Merry Disports, who exercised a twelve days' sway, perpetrating within that brief while a sufficient number of solemn tomfooleries to be repented of during the course of a long life. Not only was one of these Christmas princes appointed for the special entertainment of the sovereign and her court, but every corporation selected a similar officer to preside over the festivities of the season, and according to old Stow there was the like "in the house of every nobleman of honour or good worship, were he spiritual or temporal." Stow moreover informs us, that during the

period of the sway of the Lord of Misrule, "there were fine and subtle disguisings, masks, and mummeries, with playing at cards for counters, nails, and points in every house, more for pastime than for gain."

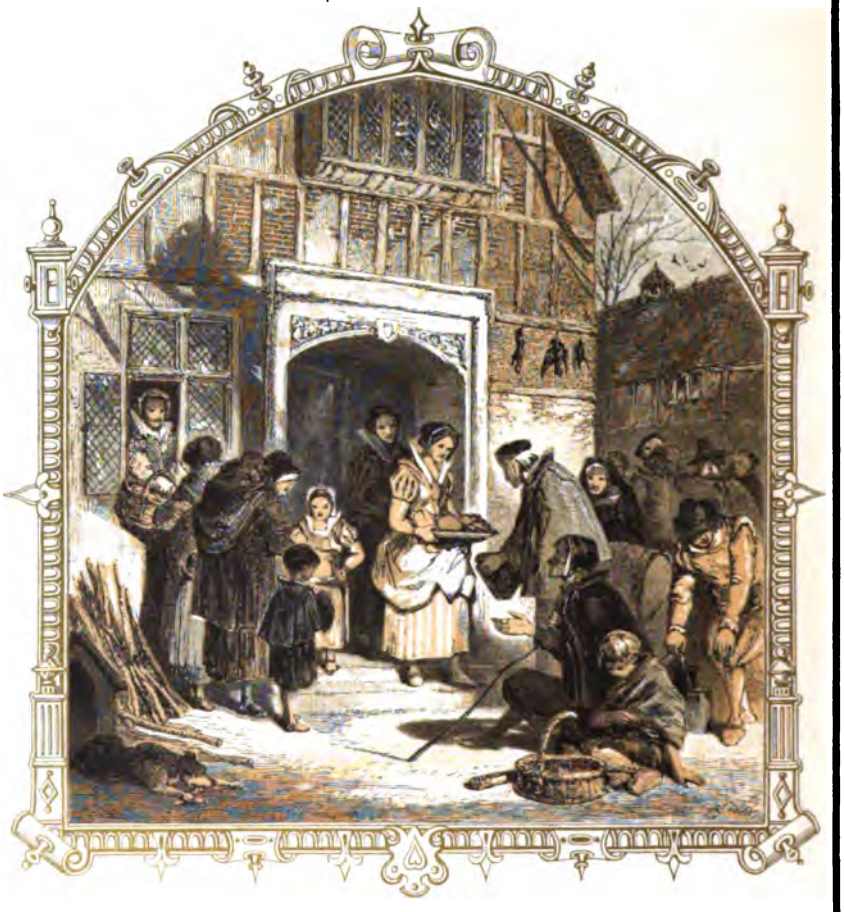
In these days town and country would seem to have vied with each other as to which should exhibit the greatest extravagance in the preparation of the Christmas entertainment, for we find Massinger exclaiming—

> "Men may talk of country Christmasses—
> Their thirty-pound buttered eggs, their pies of carps' tongues,
> Their pheasants drenched with ambergris, the carcases
> Of three fat wethers bruised for gravy, to
> Make sauce for a single peacock; yet their feasts
> Were fasts, compared with the city's."

Although a more decorous and even refined style of entertainment had usurped the place of the boisterous feastings of former times, there was no diminution in that ancient spirit of hospitality, the exercise of which had become a part of the national faith. And, in the "good old times" of the virgin queen, all classes were in a condition to put so excellent a theory into frequent practice. The labouring population of the Elizabethan era lived, it is true, in mere hovels, like the peasantry of our own day, but their fare was of a very different character. The remark of the Spanish ambassador who visited England about this period, will be recollected. "These English," said he, "have their houses made of sticks and dirt, but they fare, commonly, as well as the king." Early in the reign of Elizabeth, the substantial yeoman was housed no better than his own ploughman; and even the state rooms of royalty were then strewn daily with clean rushes, just as we now provide our stables with fresh litter. Subsequently, however, the thatched timber buildings, with their rere-dosses, or open fire-places, gave place to those picturesque red brick farm houses, and their clusters of tall chimneys, which are still to be seen scattered through almost every sequestered valley in the land. A writer of the period,* in alluding to the changes that had taken place within his own recollection, particularly calls attention to the "multitude of chimneys recently erected; whereas, in his young days, there were not above *two or three*, if so many, in most uplandish towns of the realm (the religious houses, and manor places of the lords always excepted)." The buildings themselves give ample evidence that the new fashion of chimneys was in high favour; and that these same chimneys were put to good use, and that hospitality formed part and parcel of the festivities of the Christmas season among the English yeomen of that time, may be gathered from the following poems by Tusser, which have been extracted from his "Five Hundred Points of good Husbandry."

Thomas Tusser, a georgical poet of great popularity in his own and the succeeding age, was born about 1515, and died in 1580. He was a chorister and agriculturist by turns. His great merit consists in his poems being faithful pictures of the manners, customs, and domestic life of the English farmer of that day; and in the morality, piety, and benevolent simplicity which pervade all that he has written.

* Harrison.



A DESCRIPTION OF HOUSE-KEEPING.

THOMAS TUSSER.

What then of this talent, while here we remain,
But study to yield it to God with a gain;
And that shall we do, if by us 't is not hid,
But we use and bestow it, as Christ doth us bid.

What good to get riches by breaking of sleep,
But (having the same) a good house to keep;
Not only to bring a good fame to thy door;
But also the prayer to win of the poor.

Of all other doings, house-keeping is chief,
For daily it helpeth the poor with relief;
The neighbour, the stranger, and all that have need,
Which causeth thy doings the better to speed.

Though, hearken to this, we should ever among,
Yet chiefly at Christmas of all the year long.
Good cause of that use, may appear by the name,
Though niggardly niggards do kick at the same.

A DESCRIPTION OF APT TIME TO SPEND.

THOMAS TUSSER.

Let such (so fantastical) liking not this,
Nor anything honest that ancient is,
Give place to the time, that so meet we do see,
Appointed of God, as it seemeth to be.

At Christmas good husbands have corn in the ground,
In barn, and in cellar, worth many a pound.
Things plenty in house (beside cattle and sheep),
All sent them (no doubt on) good houses to keep.

At Christmas the hardness of winter doth rage,
A griper of all things, especially age;
Then lightly poor people, the young with the old,
Be sorest oppressed with hunger and cold,

At Christmas, by labour is little to get,
That wanting, the poorest in danger are set.
What season then better of all the whole year.
Thy needy poor neighbour to comfort and cheer.

CHRISTMAS HUSBANDLY FARE.

THOMAS TUSSER.

Good husband and housewife, now chiefly be glad
Things handsome to have, as they ought to be had,
They both do provide against Christmas do come,
To welcome their neighbour, good cheer to have some;
Good bread and good drink, a good fire in the hall,
Brawn pudding and souse, and good mustard withal;

Beef, mutton, and pork, shred pies of the best,
Pig, veal, goose, and capon, and turkey well dressed;
Cheese, apples, and nuts, jolly carols to hear,
As then in the country is counted good cheer.

What cost to good husband is any of this,
Good household provision only it is;
Of other the like I do leave out a many,
That costeth the husbandman never a penny.

Religious Poems

A CAROL ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

(THOMAS TUSSER.)

AS not Christ our Saviour
Sent unto us from God above,
Not for our good behaviour,
But only of His mercy and love?
If this be true, as true it is,
Truly indeed;
Great thanks to God to yield for this
Then had we need.

HIS did our God for very troth,
To train to him the soul of man,
And justly to perform his oath:
To Sarah and to Abraham, than
That through his seed, all nations should
Most blessed be,
As in due time performed, he would
All flesh should see.

Which wondrously is brought to pass,
And in our sight already done,
By sending, as His promise was
(To comfort us), His only son,
Even Christ, I mean, that virgin's child
In Bethlehem born:
That lamb of God, that prophet mild,
With crownèd thorn.

Such was His love to save us all,
From dangers of the curse of God,
That we stood in by Adam's fall,
And by our own deservèd rod.
That through His blood and holy name,
All that believe,
And fly from sin, and abhor the same,
Shall grace receive.

For this glad news, this feast doth bring,
To God, the Son, and Holy Ghost,
Let man give thanks rejoice and sing,
From world to world, from coast to coast,
For other gifts in many ways,
That God doth send:
Let us in Christ give God the praise,
Till life shall end.

Robert Southwell, the writer of the following poem, is chiefly remembered on account of his unfortunate fate. He was educated and trained for the Catholic priesthood, and when but a mere youth, became a member of the Society of Jesus, at Rome. In 1584, at the age of twenty-four, he was sent as a missionary to England. This was at a time when religious persecution was at its height, and Elizabeth seemed bent on rivalling her sister Mary's cruel decrees. Southwell, however, enjoyed an eight years' security, but at the expiration of that time he was arrested, and underwent a long imprisonment, suffered the torture of the rack ten times, and was at length executed at Tyburn, on February 21, 1595.

NEW PRINCE, NEW POMP.

ROBERT SOUTHWELL.

Behold a silly* tender Babe,
In freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies;
Alas! a piteous sight.
The inns are full, no man will yield
This little Pilgrim bed;
But forced He is with silly beasts,
In crib to shroud His head.
Despise Him not for lying there,
First what He is inquire:
An orient pearl is often found
In depth of dirty mire.
Weigh not His crib, His wooden dish,
Nor beasts that by Him feed;
Weigh not His mother's poor attire,
Nor Joseph's simple weed.
This stable is a Prince's court,
The crib His chair of State;
The beasts are parcel of His pomp,
The wooden dish His plate;
The persons in that poor attire,
His royal liveries wear;
The Prince himself is come from Heaven,
This pomp is prizèd there.
With joy approach, O Christian wight,
Do homage to thy King;
And highly praise His humble pomp,
Which He from Heaven doth bring.

* Simple.

A HYMN

ON THE NATIVITY OF MY SAVIOUR.

BEN JONSON.

I SING the birth was born to-night,
The author both of life and light;
The angels so did sound it,
And like the ravished shepherds said,
Who saw the light, and were afraid,
Yet searched, and true they found it.

The Son of God, th' Eternal King,
That did us all salvation bring,
And freed the soul from danger;
He whom the whole world could not take,
The Word, which heaven and earth did make,
Was now laid in a manger.

The Father's wisdom willed it so,
The Son's obedience knew no No,
Both wills were in one stature;
And as that wisdom had decreed,
The Word was now made Flesh indeed,
And took on Him our nature.

What comfort by Him do we win,
Who made Himself the price of sin,
To make us heirs of Glory!
To see this babe, all innocence,
A martyr born in our defence:
Can man forget this story?

The following Christmas hymn is by Bishop Hall, one the earliest of our satiric poets, and one of the most celebrated of our old divines. He was contemporary with Shakspeare, Jonson, Spenser, and the other lights of the Elizabethan age. He, however, survived them all, and passing through the troublous times of the Commonwealth, exposed to the persecutions of the Roundhead party, died at Higham, near Norwich, in 1656.

FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

BISHOP HALL.

IMMORTAL Babe, who this dear day
Didst change thine Heaven for our clay,
And didst with flesh thy godhead veil,
Eternal Son of God, all hail!

Shine, happy star, ye angels, sing
Glory on high to Heaven's King.
Run, shepherds, leave your nightly watch,
See Heaven come down to Bethlehem's cratch.

Worship, ye sages of the east,
The King of God in meanness dressed.
O blessed maid, smile and adore
The God thy womb and arms have bore.

Star, angels, shepherds, and wild sages,
Thou virgin glory of all ages,
Restorèd frame of Heaven and Earth,
Joy in your dear Redeemer's birth!

William Drummond, of Hawthornden, the author of the two following sonnets, will be remembered as the friend of Ben Jonson, who undertook a journey to Scotland on foot, for the purpose of seeing, and conversing with one who was only known to him through the medium of correspondence. This meeting, however, did not tend to enhance their mutual regard; and Drummond left behind him at his death a manuscript account of the interview, which indicated in plain terms his disapprobation of Jonson's want of refinement, both as regards his manners and habits.

THE ANGELS' SONG.

WILLIAM DRUMMOND.

RUN Shepherds, run where Bethlem blest appears,
We bring the best of news, be not dismayed,
A Saviour there is born, more old than years,
Amidst Heaven's rolling heights this earth who stayed;
In a poor cottage inned, a Virgin Maid,
There is He poorly swaddled, in manger laid,
A weakling did Him bear, who all upbears,
To whom too narrow swaddlings are our spheres:
Run, shepherds, run, and solemnize His birth,
This is that night, no—day grown great with bliss,
In which the power of Satan broken is;
In Heaven be glory, peace unto the Earth.
Thus singing through the air the Angels swam,
And cope of stars re-echoèd the same.

THE SHEPHERDS' SONG.

WILLIAM DRUMMOND.

O THAN the fairest day, thrice fairer night!
Night to best days in which a sun doth rise,
Of which that golden eye, which clears the skies,
Is but a sparkling ray, a shadow light:
And blessed ye, in silly pastor's sight,
Mild creatures, in whose warm crib now lies
That Heaven-sent Youngling, holy Maid-born Wight,
Midst, end, beginning of our prophesies:
Blest cottage that hath flowers in winter spread,
Though withered; blessed grass, that hath the grace
To deck, and be a carpet to that place.
Thus sang, unto the sounds of oaten reed,
Before the Babe, the Shepherds bowed on knees,
And springs ran nectar, honey dropt from trees.

CHRISTMAS.

GEORGE HERBERT.

All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I, both tired, body and mind,
With full cry of affections, quite astray,
I took up in the next inn I could find;
There when I came, whom found I but my dear,
My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to him, ready there
To be all passengers' most sweet relief?
O Thou, whose glorious, yet contracted light,
Wrapt in night's mantle, stole into a manger;
Since my dark soul and brutish is thy right,
To man of all beasts be not thou a stranger:
Furnish and deck my soul, that thou mayst have
A better lodging, than a rack or grave.

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for Thee?
My soul 's a shepherd too; a flock it feeds
Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.
The pasture is thy word; the streams, thy grace
Enriching all the place.
Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Outsing the daylight hours.
Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right:
We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold.
I will go searching, till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done;
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly,
As frost-night suns look sadly.

Then we will sing, and shine all our own day,
And one another pay:
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine,
Till e'en his beams sing, and my music shine.

THE SHEPHERD'S SONG.

EDMUND BOLTON.

SWEET Music, sweeter far
Than any song is sweet—
Sweet Music heavenly rare,
Mine ears, O peers, doth greet.
You gentle flocks—whose fleeces, pearled with dew,
Resemble Heaven, whom golden drops make bright—
Listen, O listen, now; O not to you
Our pipes make sport to shorten weary night;
But voices most divine
Make blissful harmony—
Voices that seem to shine;
For what else clears the sky?
Tunes can we hear, but not the singers see:
The tune's divine, and so the singers be.

Lo, how the firmament
Within an azure fold
The flock of stars hath pent,
That we might them behold.
Yet from their beams proceedeth not this light,
Nor can their crystals such reflection give.
What then doth make the element so bright?
The heavens are come down upon earth to live.

But hearken to the song,
Glory to Glory's King,
And peace all men among,
These choristers do sing.
Angels they are, as also Shepherds, He
Whom in our fear we do admire to see.

Let not amazement blind
Your souls, said he, annoy:
To you and all mankind
My message bringeth joy.
For lo, the world's great Shepherd now is born,
A blessed Babe, an Infant full of power:
After long night, up-risen is the morn,
Renowning Bethlem in the Saviour.
Sprung is the perfect day,
By prophets seen afar,
Sprung is the mirthful May,
Which Winter cannot mar.
In David's city doth this Sun appear,
Clouded in flesh, yet Shepherds sit we here.

"Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither;
Here shall he see
No enemy,
But winter and rough weather." SHAKSPEARE.

The following extracts comprise descriptions of Winter and the Christmas season, by the three greatest poets of the Elizabethan era, viz., Shakspeare, Spenser, and Jonson. These are preceded by some nervous lines penned by old Sackville, whose writings gave the tone to the revival of poetry at the commencement of Elizabeth's reign. Like the mere fragment quoted from Chaucer, they are the slightest possible

sketches; and yet the Winter song of Shakspeare's, from "As you like it," furnishes us with a picture in every line, and leaves us cause for regret that the few poems, we have here collected together, comprise the whole that the poet of all time has written relative to our subject. Jonson, as is well known, wrote a masque entitled "Christmas," but the verses it contains are the veriest doggrel, and the wit it is seasoned with is of the smallest quality; we therefore refrain from printing an extract from it, but give instead, a quotation from one of his poems, published under the title of "The Forest."

The stanzas by Spenser are from one of the imperfect books of the "Fairy Queen." It was evidently this description of Winter which Southey had in mind when he wrote the Sonnet quoted in Division VI. of the present work.

WINTER.

THOMAS SACKVILLE.

THE wrathful winter, 'proaching on a-pace
With blust'ring blast, had all ybared the treen;
And old Saturnus, with his frosty face,
With chilling cold had pierced the tender green;
The mantle rent wherein enwrappèd been
The gladsome groves that now lay overthrown,
The tapers torn, and every tree down blown;
The soil, that erst so seemly used to seem,
Was all despoilèd of her beauties' hue,
And stole fresh flowers, (wherewith the Summer's queen
Had clad the earth) now Boreas' blast down blew;
And small fowls flocking, in their songs did rue
The Winter's wrath, wherewith each thing, defaced,
In woeful wise bewail'd the Summer past:
Hawthorn had lost his motley livery,
The naked twigs were shivering all for cold,
And, dropping down the tears abundantly,
Each thing, methought, with weeping eye me told
The cruel season, bidding me withhold
Myself within.

When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail;

When blood is nipped, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
To-whoo;
Tu-whit, to-whoo, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel* the pot.

* Cool.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw;

When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
To-whoo;
Tu-whit, to-whoo, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

CHRISTMAS TIDE.

W. SHAKSPEARE.

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed, and so gracious is the time.

WINTER.

EDMUND SPENSER.

Next came the chill December:
Yet he, through merry feasting which he made
And great bonfires, did not the cold remember;
His Saviour's birth his mind so much did glad:
Upon a shaggy bearded goat he rode,
The same wherewith Dan Jove in tender years,
They say, was nourished by th' Iœan maid;
And in his hand a broad deep bowl he bears,
Of which he freely drinks an health to all his peers.

Lastly, came Winter clothèd all in frieze,
Chattering his teeth for cold that did him chill;
Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freeze,
And the dull drops, that from his purpled bill,
As from a limbeck, did adown distil:
In his right hand a tipped staff he held,
With which his feeble steps he stayèd still;
For he was faint with cold, and weak with eld,
That scarce his loosèd limbs he able was to wield.

WINTER,

ADDRESSED TO SIR ROBERT WROTH.

BEN JONSON.

THOU, in the winter, hunt'st the flying hare,
More for thy exercise, than fare;
While all that follow, their glad ears apply
To the full greatness of the cry;

Or hawking at the river, or the bush,
Or shooting at the greedy thrush,
Thou dost with some delight the day out wear,
Although the coldest of the year!
The whilst the several seasons thou hast seen
Of flow'ry fields, of copses green,
The mowèd meadows, with the fleecèd sheep,
And feasts that either shearers keep;
The ripened ears, yet humble in their height,
And furrows laden with their weight;
The apple-harvest, that doth longer last;
The hogs returned home fat from mast;*
The trees cut out in log, and those boughs made
A fire now, that lent a shade!
Thus Pan and Sylvan, having had their rites,
Comus puts in for new delights,
And fills thy open hall with mirth and cheer,
As if in Saturn's reign it were;
Apollo's harp, and Hermes' lyre resound,
Nor are the Muses strangers found:
The rout of rural folk come thronging in,
(Their rudeness then is thought no sin,)
Thy noblest spouse affords them welcome grace;
And the great heroes of her race
Sit mixt with loss of state, or reverence.
Freedom doth with degree dispense.
The jolly wassail walks the often round,
And in their cups their cares are drowned.

* The fruit of the oak or beech.

The annexed is the only Carol on bringing in the Boar's Head that belongs to the era of Elizabeth and her successor James I. It was used before the Christmas Prince at St. John the Baptist's College, Oxford, in 1607. The engraving below is from an ancient carving, which is supposed to have been the veritable sign of the famous Boar's Head tavern in Eastcheap.

BOAR'S HEAD CAROL.

THE Boar is dead,
Lo, here is his head:
What man could have done more
Than his head off to strike,
Meleager like,
And bring it as I do before?

He living spoiled
Where good men toiled,
Which made kind Ceres sorry;
But now, dead and drawn,
Is very good brawn,
And we have brought it for ye.

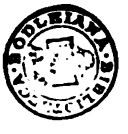
Then set down the swineyard,
The foe to the vineyard,
Let Bacchus crown his fall;
Let this boar's head and mustard
Stand for pig, goose, and custard,
And so you are welcome all.

The following capital song affords an admirable contrast between the courtiers of Elizabeth, and those of her successor. The queen was opposed to the fashion then becoming prevalent, of country gentlemen spending their Christmas in London; and in a letter of the period, written by her orders, "the gentlemen of Norfolk and Suffolk are commanded to depart from London before Christmas, and repair to their counties, and there to keep hospitality among their neighbours." The country gentry, however, appear to have availed themselves of the opportunity of gratifying their hankering for a town life, when there was no imperious queen to issue her opposing commands, for we find a writer of the reign of James I. expressing himself in the following strain:—"Much do I detest that effeminacy of the most that burn out day and night in their beds, and by the fireside in trifles, gaming, or courting their yellow mistresses all the winter in a city; appearing, but as cuckoos in the spring, one time in the year to the country and their tenants, leaving the care of keeping good houses at Christmas to the honest yeomen of the country."

The song is reprinted from the "Percy Reliques." It is there stated to have been taken from a black-letter copy in the Pepys' Collection.

THE OLD AND YOUNG COURTIER.

I'LL sing you an old song made by a fine old pate,
Of a worshipful old gentleman who had a great estate,
That kept a brave old house at a bountiful rate,
And an old porter to relieve the poor at his gate:
Like an old courtier of the queen's,
And the queen's old courtier.



With an old lady, whose anger one word assuages,
That every quarter paid their old servants their wages,
And never knew what belonged to coachmen, footmen, nor pages,
But kept twenty old fellows with blue coats and badges:
Like an old courtier, &c.

With an old study filled full of learned old books,
With an old reverend chaplain, you might know him by his looks,
With an old buttery hatch worn quite off the hooks,
And an old kitchen, that maintained half a dozen old cooks:
Like an old courtier, &c.

With an old hall, hung about with pikes, guns, and bows,
With old swords and bucklers, that had borne many
shrewd blows,
And an old frieze coat, to cover his worship's trunk hose,
And a cup of old sherry, to comfort his copper nose:
Like an old courtier, &c.

With a good old fashion, when Christmas was come,
To call in all his old neighbours with bagpipe and drum,
With good cheer enough to furnish every old room,
And old liquor able to make a cat speak, and man dumb:
Like an old courtier, &c.

With an old falconer, huntsman, and a kennel of hounds,
That never hawked, nor hunted, but in his own grounds;
Who, like a wise man, kept himself within his own bounds,
And when he died gave every child a thousand good pounds:
Like an old courtier, &c.

But to his eldest son his house and land he assigned,
Charging him in his will to keep the old bountiful mind,
To be good to his old tenants, and to his neighbours be kind;
But in the ensuing ditty you shall hear how he was inclined:
Like a young courtier of the king's,
And the king's young courtier.

Like a flourishing young gallant, newly come to his land,
Who keeps a brace of painted madams at his command,
And takes up a thousand pound upon his father's land,
And gets drunk in a tavern, till he can neither go nor stand:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With a new-fangled lady, that is dainty, nice, and spare,
Who never knew what belonged to good house-keeping, or care,
Who buys gaudy-coloured fans to play with wanton air,
And seven or eight different dressings of other women's hair:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With a new-fashioned hall, built where the old one stood,
Hung round with new pictures, that do the poor no good,
With a fine marble chimney, wherein burns neither coal nor wood,
And a new smooth shovelboard, whereon no victuals e'er stood:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With a new study, stuft full of pamphlets and plays,
And a new chaplain, that swears faster than he prays,
With a new buttery hatch, that opens once in four or five days,
And a new French cook, to devise fine kickshaws, and toys:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With a new fashion, when Christmas is drawing on,
On a new journey to London straight we all must begone,
And leave none to keep house, but our new porter John,
Who relieves the poor with a thump on the back with a stone:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With a new gentleman-usher, whose carriage is complete,
With a new coachman, footmen, and pages to carry up the meat,
With a waiting-gentlewoman, whose dressing is very neat,
Who, when her lady has dined, lets the servants not eat:
Like a young courtier, &c.

With new titles of honour bought with his father's old gold,
For which sundry of his ancestors' old manors are sold;
And this is the course most of our new gallants hold,
Which makes that good house-keeping is now grown so cold,
Among the young courtiers of the king,
Or the king's young courtiers.

The custom of Mumming, which appears to have prevailed during the middle ages throughout the Christmas season, had its origin in some similar amusement forming a portion of the revels of the ancient Saturnalia. Several of the old chroniclers have left us descriptions of the most celebrated of these entertainments in which our kings and princes have taken part. The earliest account that has been preserved is of a grand mumming performed by the citizens of London, in 1377, for the entertainment of the young prince Richard, son of the Black Prince. On this occasion, one hundred and thirty citizens disguised as emperors, popes, and cardinals, with knights and their more humble esquires, all wearing vizors and well mounted, and attended by numerous torch-bearers, rode to the palace of the young prince at Kennington to the sound of trumpets, sackbuts, and other music. Games at dice were played, followed by feasting and dancing, "which jolitie being ended, the mummers were again made to drink and then departed in order as they came." While the higher classes thus disported themselves, the lower orders were content with an humble imitation of the magnificent pageantry of these entertainments. They went from house to house with their faces blackened with soot and bedaubed with paint—the men frequently attired in female costume, and the women in costume of the other sex—when they made merry amongst their friends and neighbours who provided them with good store of Christmas cheer.

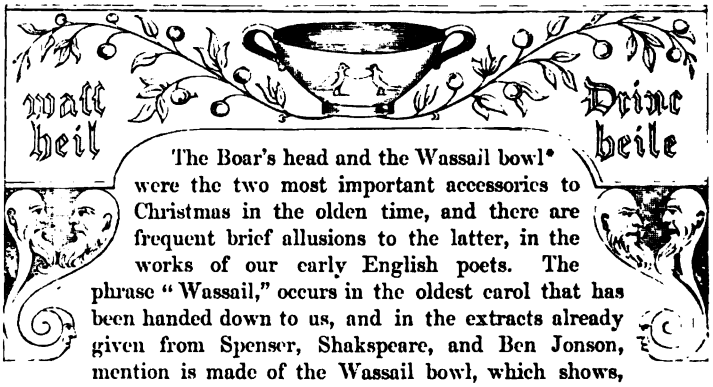
MUMMING.

(From "La Musa Madrigalesca.")

O shorten winter's sadness,
See where the nymphs with gladness
Disguised all are coming,
Right wantonly a mumming.
Fa la.

Whilst youthful sports are lasting,
To feasting turn our fasting;
With revels and with wassails,
Make grief and care our vassals.
Fa la.

For youth it well beseemeth,
That pleasure he esteemeth;
And sullen age is hated,
That mirth would have abated.
Fa la.



The Boar's head and the Wassail bowl* were the two most important accessories to Christmas in the olden time, and there are frequent brief allusions to the latter, in the works of our early English poets. The phrase "Wassail," occurs in the oldest carol that has been handed down to us, and in the extracts already given from Spenser, Shakspeare, and Ben Jonson, mention is made of the Wassail bowl, which shows, that in their day it continued to form a necessary portion of the festivities appertaining to the season. New-year's eve and Twelfth-night were the occasions on which the Wassail bowl was chiefly in requisition. In a collection of ordinances for the regulation of the royal household, in the reign of Henry VII., on Twelfth-night the steward was enjoined, when he entered with the spiced and smoking beverage, to cry "Wassail" three times, to which the royal chaplain—jolly priest, as he doubtless was—had to answer with a song. While the wealthier classes were enjoying themselves with copious draughts of "lambs' wool," as the beverage, composed of ale, nutmeg, sugar, toast, and roasted crabs, or apples, with which the bowl was filled, was styled, the poorer sort of people went from house to house with Wassail bowls adorned with ribbons, singing carols, and inviting those whom they visited to drink; in return for which, little presents of money were generally bestowed upon them.

The following Carol is from Ritson's ancient songs. It was taken by Ritson from a scarce, black-letter volume, in the Ashmolean Museum.

* The above representation of a Wassail Bowl is from a carving on a chimney-piece of an old mansion formerly existing at Birling, Kent.

A CAROL FOR A WASSAIL BOWL.

A JOLLY Wassail Bowl,
A Wassail of good ale,
Well fare the butler's soul,
That setteth this to sale—
Our jolly Wassail.

Good dame, here at your door
Our Wassail we begin,
We are all maidens poor,
We pray now let us in,
With our Wassail.

Our Wassail we do fill
With apples and with spice,
Then grant us your good will,
To taste here once or twice
Of our Wassail.

If any maidens be
Here dwelling in this house,
They kindly will agree
To take a full carouse
Of our Wassail.

But here they let us stand
All freezing in the cold;
Good master, give command
To enter and be bold,
With our Wassail.

Much joy into this hall
With us is entered in,
Our master first of all,
We hope will now begin,
Of our Wassail.

And after, his good wife
Our spiced bowl will try,—
The Lord prolong your life!
Good fortune we espy,
For our Wassail.

Some bounty from your hands,
Our Wassail to maintain:
We 'll buy no house nor lands
With that which we do gain,
With our Wassail.

HOLLY SONG.

This is our merry night
Of choosing King and Queen,
Then be it your delight
That something may be seen
In our Wassail.

It is a noble part
To bear a liberal mind;
God bless our master's heart!
For here we comfort find,
With our Wassail.

And now we must be gone,
To seek out more good cheer;
Where bounty will be shown,
As we have found it here,
With our Wassail.

Much joy betide them all,
Our prayers shall be still,
We hope, and ever shall,
For this your great good will
To our Wassail.

HOLLY SONG.

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.

Heigh, ho! sing heigh, ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly;
Then, heigh ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.
Heigh, ho! sing heigh, ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly;
Then, heigh ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly.

DIVISION III.

POEMS BY HERRICK RELATING TO THE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL.

AMONG all our English poets, the one, who has left us by far the most complete contemporary picture of the Christmas season, was a country clergyman of the reign of Charles I., who held a small living in a remote part of Devonshire. Robert Herrick, for it is of him we speak, was born in London, and received his early education, it is supposed, at Westminster School, from whence he removed to Cambridge, and after taking his degree, spent some few years in London, in familiar intercourse with the chief wits, and writers of the age. Herrick had for his early intimates Ben Jonson, Selden, William Lawes the eminent composer, and Endymion Porter, groom of the chamber to the King, besides many others of equal note, and it was with regret that he resigned the enjoyment of their society, to enter upon the duties connected with the living of Dean-Prior's, to which he was presented in 1629. For near twenty years, until he was ejected from his cure by the committee appointed by the Long Parliament, on account of his Royalist opinions, he led the retired life of a country priest; and, during this period, it would appear that most of his poems were written descriptive of the ceremonies, superstitions, and festivities of the Christmas season. On leaving Dean-Prior's, deeply regretted by his parishioners, who styled him their "ancient and famous poet,"—and Herrick was then fifty-seven years of age—he removed to London, where he settled down at his "beloved Westminster." The hand of death, during his twenty years' absence, had been laid upon most of his old companions. Jonson had died, just as the troubles with which the reign of Charles was so thickly beset had commenced in earnest. Lawes had fallen at the siege of Chester, mourned for by his King. Endymion Porter had died abroad. Selden alone survived in the enjoyment of a green old age. Herrick, however, found new friends in Charles Cotton, and Sir John Denham, the bard of Cooper's Hill, but deprived of his income he lived a life of penury, and dependence, until the restoration of Charles II., when he was again inducted to the living from which he had been expelled, and died in 1674, at the advanced age of eighty-three.

The Christmas poems of Herrick form quite a series of themselves, and for this reason they are comprised in a distinct section of this work. instead of being mixed up with contemporary productions by other hands. The first poem is descriptive of the ceremony attending the bringing in the Christmas or Yule log, a custom of very ancient date; yet, nevertheless, this is the first occasion that we find allusion to it in the writings of our earlier poets.

CEREMONY FOR CHRISTMAS EVE.

COME bring with a noise,
My merry merry boys,
The Christmas log to the firing;
While my good dame, she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your heart's desiring.

With the last year's brand
Light the new block, and
For good success in his spending,
On your psaltries play,
That sweet luck may,
Come while the log is a tending.

Drink now the strong beer,
Cut the white loaf here,
The while the meat is a shredding
For the rare mince-pie,
And the plums stand by,
To fill the paste that's a kneading.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

COME, guard this night the Christmas pie,
That the thief, though ne'er so sly,
With his flesh-hooks, don't come nigh
To catch it,

From him, who all alone sits there,
Having his eyes still in his ear,
And a deal of nightly fear,
To watch it.

In Herrick's time, the Watchman and Bellman were one and the same. The latter appellation arose, we expect, from its being the practice of these ancient guardians of the night to carry with them a large bell, either for the purpose of summoning assistance when required, or else to enable them the more effectually to disturb the slumbers of those who, snug asleep, cared very little to know how the hours happened to be progressing. Now-a-days the Bellman is quite a Christmas character. The office is generally usurped by the beadle or parish constable, who constitutes himself Bellman for one day in the year, viz., Boxing Day, in the hope that, by the presentation of some miserable doggerel rhymes to his "worthy masters," the inhabitants of the parish, of which he is so important an officer, he may reap a rich and unmerited reward.

THE BELL-MAN.

FROM noise of scare-fires* rest ye free,
From murders *Benedicite!*
From all mischances that may fright
Your pleasing slumbers in the night;
Mercy secure ye all, and keep
The goblin from ye, while ye sleep.
Past one o'clock, and almost two,
My masters all, "Good day to you."

* Alarms of fire.

AN ODE ON THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR.

In numbers, and but these few,
I sing thy Birth, Oh Jesu!
Thou pretty Baby, born here,
With sup'rabundant scorn here:
Who for Thy princely port here,
Hadst for Thy place
Of Birth, a base
Out-stable for thy court here.

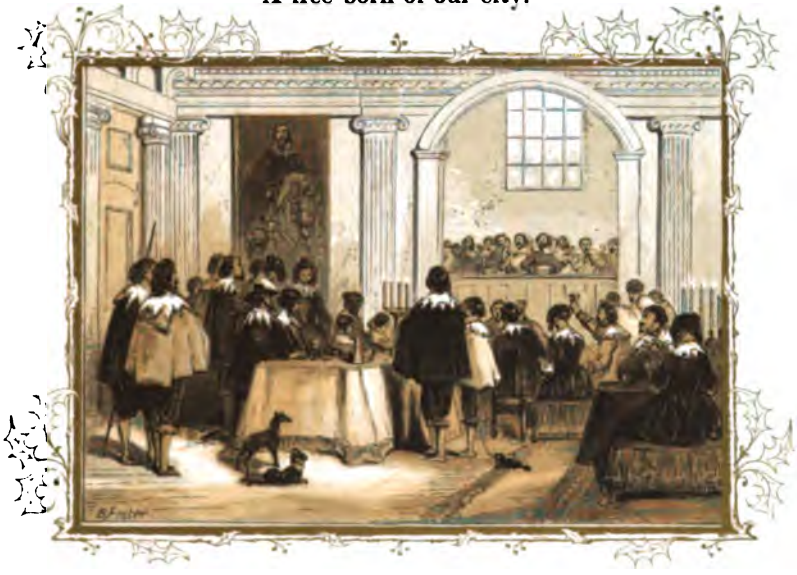
Instead of neat inclosures
Of interwoven osiers;
Instead of fragrant posies
Of daffodils, and roses;
Thy cradle, Kingly Stranger,
As Gospel tells,
Was nothing else
But, here, a homely manger.

But we with silks, not cruells,*
With sundry precious jewels,
And lily-work will dress Thee;
And as we dispossess Thee
Of clouds, we'll make a chamber,
Sweet Babe, for Thee,
Of ivory,
And plastered round with amber.

The Jews they did disdain Thee,
But we will entertain Thee
With glories to await here
Upon thy princely state here;

* Worsteds.

And more for love, than pity,
From year to year
We 'll make Thee, here,
A free-born of our city.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL,

SUNG TO THE KING * IN THE PRESENCE AT WHITEHALL.

CHORUS.

WHAT sweeter music can we bring
Than a carol, for to sing
The birth of this our Heavenly King?
Awake the voice! awake the string!
Heart, ear, and eye, and everything,
Awake! the while the active finger
Runs division with the singer.

I.

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
And give the honour to this day.
That sees December turned to May.

* Charles I.

II.

If we may ask the reason, say
The why, and wherefore all things here
Seem like the spring time of the year?

III.

Why does the chilling winter's morn
Smile, like a field beset with corn?
Or smell, like to a mead new shorn,
Thus, on the sudden?

IV.

Come and see
The cause, why things thus fragrant be:
'T is He is born, whose quickening birth
Gives life and lustre, public mirth,
To Heaven and the under Earth.

CHORUS.

We see Him come, and know him ours,
Who with his sunshine and his showers,
Turns all the patient ground to flowers.

I.

The darling of the world is come,
And fit it is we find a room
To welcome him.

II.

The nobler part
Of all the house here, is the heart.

CHORUS.

Which we will give Him; and bequeath
This holly and this ivy wreath,
To do Him honour who 's our King,
And Lord of all this revelling.

Although the following poem contains no immediate reference to the Christmas season, still, the pictures which it presents of the hospitality of the period, and the character of the entertainment met with at the table of a country gentleman, of the reign of Charles I., render it peculiarly applicable to that particular season of the year, when open-handed liberality, such as it commemorates, is in the ascendant.

TRUE HOSPITALITY:

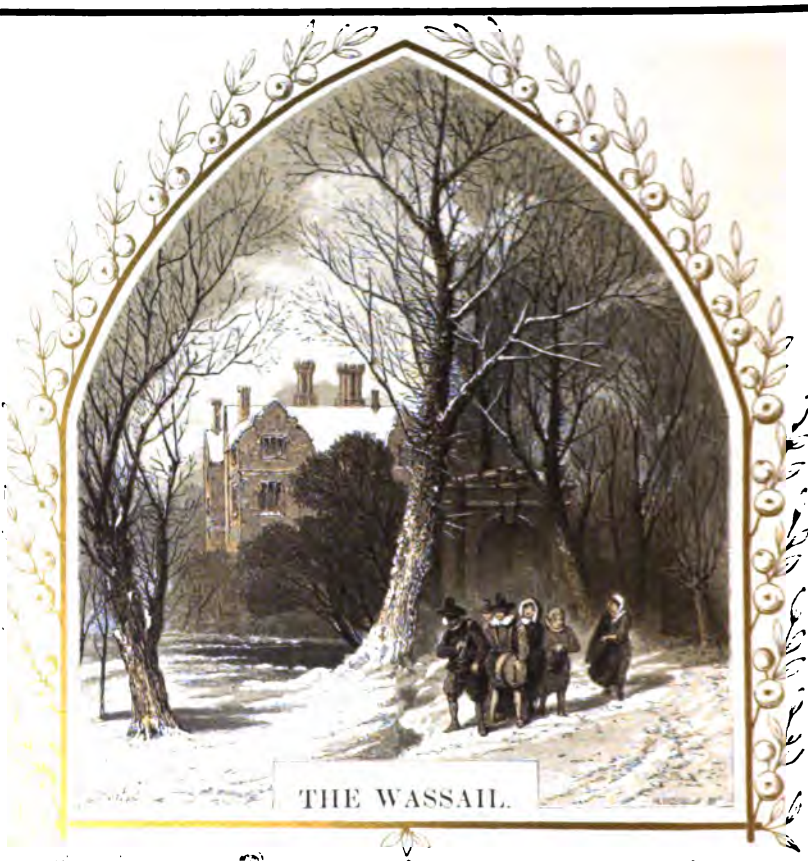
A PANEGYRIC TO SIR LEWIS PEMBERTON.

Till I shall come again, let this suffice,
I send my salt, my sacrifice
To thee, thy lady, younglings, and as far
As to thy Genius and thy Larr; *
To the worn threshold, porch, hall, parlour; kitchen,
The fat-fed smoking temple, which in
The wholesome savour of thy mighty chines,
Invites to supper him who dines;
Where laden spits, warped with large ribs of beef,
Not represent, but give relief
To the lank stranger and the sour swain,
Where both may feed and come again.
For no black-bearded vigil from thy door
Beats with a buttoned-staff the poor;
But from thy warm love-hatching gates, each may
Take friendly morsels, and there stay
To sun his thin-clad members, if he likes,
For thou no porter keep'st who strikes.
No comer to thy roof his guest-rite wants;
Or, staying there, is scourged with taunts
Of some rough groom, who, yirked with corns, says, "Sir,
You 've dipt too long i' th' vinegar;
And with our broth and bread and bits, Sir friend,
You 've farèd well, pray make an end;

* An elfish spirit.

Two days you 've larded here; a third, you know,
Makes guests and fish smell strong; pray go
You to some other chimney, and there take
Essay of other giblets; make
Merry at another's hearth! you 're here
Welcome as thunder to our beer."
Manners know distance, and a man unrude
Would soon recoil, and not intrude
His stomach to a second meal. No, no,
Thy house, well fed and taught, can show
No such crabbed visard: Thou hast learned thy train
With heart and hand to entertain;
And by the armsful, with the breast unhid,
As the old race of mankind did
When either's heart, and either's hand did strive
To be the nearer relative:
Thou dost redeem those times; and what was lost
Of ancient honesty, may boast
It keeps a growth in thee, and so will run
A course in thy fame's pledge, thy son.
Thus, like a Roman Tribune, thou thy gate
Early sets ope to feast, and late;
Keeping no currish waiter to affright,
With blasting eye, the appetite,
Which fain would waste upon thy cates, but that
The trencher creature marketh what
Best and more suppling piece he cuts, and by
Some private pinch tells danger 's nigh—
A hand too desp'rate, or a knife that bites
Skin deep into the pork, or lights
Upon some part of kid, as if mistook,
When checkèd by the butler's look.

No, no, thy bread, thy wine, thy jocund beer
Is not reserved for Trebins here,
But all who at thy table seated are,
Find equal freedom, equal fare:
And thou, like to that hospitable god,
Jove, joy'st when guests make their abode
To eat thy bullock's thighs, thy veals, thy fat
Wethers, and never grudged at
The pheasant, partridge, godwit, reeve, ruff, rail,
The cock, the curlew, and the quail:
These, and thy choicest viands do extend
Their taste unto the lower end
Of thy glad table; not a dish more known
To thee, than unto any one.
But as thy meat, so thy immortal wine
Makes the smirk face of each to shine,
And spring fresh rosebuds, while the salt, the wit
Flows from the wine, and graces it;
While reverence, waiting at the bashful board,
Honours my lady and my lord.
No scurrile jest, no open scene is laid
Here, for to make the face afraid;
But temp'rate mirth dealt forth, and so discreet-
Ly, that it makes the meat more sweet,
And adds perfumes unto the wine, which thou
Dost rather pour forth, than allow
By cruise and measure; thus devoting wine
As the Canary Isles were thine;
But with that wisdom and that method, as
No one that 's there his guilty glass
Drinks of distemper, or has cause to cry
Repentance to his liberty.



THE WASSAIL.

GIVE way, give way, ye gates, and win
An easy blessing to your bin
And basket, by our entering in.

May both with manchet* stand replete,
Your larders, too, so hung with meat,
That though a thousand thousand eat,

Yet, ere twelve moons shall whirl about
Their silv'ry spheres, there 's none may doubt
But more 's sent in than was served out.

Next, may your dairies prosper so,
As that your pans no ebb may know;
But if they do, the more to flow:

* Fine wheaten bread.

Like to a solemn sober stream,
Banked all with lilies, and the cream
Of sweetest cowslips filling them.

Then may your plants be pressed with fruit,
Nor bee nor hive you have be mute,
But sweetly sounding like a lute.

Next, may your duck and teeming hen,
Both to the cock's tread say, amen;
And for their two eggs render ten.

Last, may your harrows, shares, and ploughs,
Your stacks, your stocks, your sweetest mows,
All prosper by your virgin-vows.

Alas! we bless, but see none here,
That brings us either ale or beer;
In a dry house all things are near.

Let's leave a longer time to wait,
Where rust and cobwebs bind the gate,
And all live here with needy fate;

Where chimneys do for ever weep,
For want of warmth, and stomachs keep
With noise the servants' eyes from sleep.

It is in vain to sing, or stay
Our free feet here, but we 'll away;
Yet to the Larés this we 'll say:

The time will come when you 'll be sad,
And reckon this for fortune bad,
T' have lost the good ye might have had.

A HYMN TO THE LARES.

T was, and still my care is,
To worship ye, the Larès,
With crowns of greenest parsley,
And garlic chives not scarcely;
For favours here to warm me,
And not by fire to harm me;
For gladding so my hearth here
With inoffensive mirth here;
That while the Wassail bowl here
With North-down ale doth trowl here,
No syllable doth fall here,
To mar the mirth at all here.
For which, O chimney-keepers!
I dare not call ye sweepers,
So long as I am able
To keep a country table,
Great be my fare, or small cheer,
I'll eat and drink up all here.

THE WASSAIL BOWL.

ADDRESSED TO HIS FRIEND JOHN WICKES.

NEXT will I cause my hopeful lad,
If a wild apple can be had,
To crown the hearth;
Larr thus conspiring with our mirth;
Then to infuse
Our browner ale into the cruise,

Which sweetly spiced, we'll first carouse
Unto the genius of the house;

Then the next health to friends of mine,
Loving the brave Burgundian wine,
High sons of pith,
Whose fortunes I have frolicked with,
Such as could well
Bear up the magic bough and spell,
And dancing 'bout the mystic thyrse,
Give up the just applause to verse.

To those, and then again to thee
We'll drink, my Wickes; until we be
Plump as the cherry,
Though not so fresh, yet full as merry
As the cricket,
The untamed heifer, or the pricket;*
Until our tongues shall tell our ears,
We're younger by a score of years:

Thus, 'till we see the fire less shine
From th' embers than the kitling's eyne,
We'll still sit up,
Sphering about the Wassail cup
To all those times
Which gave me honour for my rhymes:
The coal once spent, we'll then to bed,
Far more than night bewearièd.

* The buck in his second year.

A NEW YEAR'S GIFT,

SENT TO SIR SIMEON STEWARD.

No news of navies burnt at seas;
No news of late-spawned titteries;
No closet-plot, or open vent,
That frights men with a Parliament;
No new device or late-found trick,
To read by th' stars the kingdom's sick;
No gin to catch the state, or wring
The free-born nostrils of the king,
We send to you;—but here a jolly
Verse, crowned with ivy and with holly,
That tells of winter's tales and mirth,
That milk-maids make about the hearth;
Of Christmas sports, the Wassail bowl,
That's tossed up after Fox-i'th'hole;*
Of Blind-man's-buff, and of the care
That young men have to shoe the mare;
Of twelfth-tide cake, of peas and beans,†
Wherewith ye make those merry scenes,
When as ye choose your king and queen,
And cry out "Hey for our town green;"
Of ash-heaps, in the which ye use
Husbands and wives by streaks to choose;
Of crackling laurel, which fore-sounds
A plenteous harvest to your grounds;—
Of these, and such like things, for shift,
We send, instead of new-year's gift.
Read, then, and when your faces shine
With bucksome meat and cap'ring wine,

* A very old game: those who took part in it hopped on one leg, and beat each other with leathern thongs, with a view, we presume, of forcing the raised leg to touch the ground.

† It was formerly the custom to place a bean and a pea in the Twelfth Cake, and the person who obtained the piece containing the former was chosen king, and the latter, queen, of the evening. See the poem on page 87.

Remember us in cups full crowned,
And let our city health go round,
Quite through the young maids and the men,
To the ninth number, if not ten,
Until the firèd chestnuts leap
For joy to see the fruits ye reap,
From the plump chalice and the cup
That tempts till it be tossèd up.
Then as ye sit about your embers,
Call not to mind those fled Decembers;
But think on these, that are t' appear,
As daughters to the instant year;
Sit crowned with rose-buds, and carouse,
Till *Liber Pater* twirls the house
About your ears, and lay upon
The year, your cares, that's fled and gone.
And let the russet swains the plough
And harrow hang up, resting now;
And to the bag-pipe all address,
Till sleep takes place of weariness.
And thus, throughout, with Christmas plays,
Frolic the full twelve holydays.

The following refers to a custom that prevailed in Devonshire, and other cider counties, of throwing the dregs of the Wassail-bowl against the stems of the best bearing fruit trees, on the eve of Twelfth-day. Further particulars respecting this singular practice are given in the next section.

A SPELL.

WASSAIL the trees, that they may bear
You many a plum and many a pear;
For more or less fruit they will bring,
As you do give them wassailing.

THE STAR SONG.

I.

TELL us, thou clear and heavenly tongue,
Where is the Babe that lately sprung?
Lies he the lily-banks among?

II.

Or say, if this new Birth of ours
Sleeps, laid within some ark of flowers,
Spangled with dew-light? thou canst clear
All doubts, and manifest the where.

III.

Declare to us, bright star, if we shall seek
Him in the morning's blushing cheek,
Or search the beds of spices through,
To find him out?

STAR.

No, this ye need not do;
But only come and see Him rest,
A Princely Babe, in 's mother's breast.

CHORUS.

He 's seen! He 's seen! why then around,
Let 's kiss the sweet and holy ground;
And all rejoice that we have found
A King, before conception, crowned.

IV.

Come then, come then, and let us bring
Unto our pretty twelfth-tide King,
Each one his several offering.

CHORUS.

And when night comes we'll give him wassailing;
And that his treble honours may be seen,
We 'll choose him King, and make his mother Queen.

TWELFTH NIGHT, OR KING AND QUEEN.

Now, now the mirth comes,
With the cake full of plums,
Where bean 's the king of the sport here;
Beside we must know,
The pea also
Must revel as queen in the court here.

Begin then to choose,
This night as you use,
Who shall for the present delight here;
Be a king by the lot,
And who shall not
Be twelfth-day queen for the night here.

Which known, let us make
Joy-sops with the cake;
And let not a man then be seen here,
Who unurged will not drink,
To the base from the brink,
A health to the king and queen here.

Next crown the bowl full
With gentle lambs' wool;
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger,
With store of ale too;
And thus ye must do
To make the wassail a swinger.

Give then to the king
And queen wassailing;
And though with ale ye be wet here,
Yet part ye from hence,
As free from offence,
As when ye innocent met here.

ST. DISTAFF'S DAY;

OR, THE MORROW AFTER TWELFTH DAY.

Partly work and partly play
Ye must on St. Distaff's Day;

From the plough soon free your team,
Then come home and fother them.

If the maids a spinning go,
Burn the flax, and fire the tow;

Bring in pails of water then,
Let the maids bewash the men;

Give St. Distaff all the right,
Then bid Christmas sport good night;

And next morrow, every one
To his own vacation.

CEREMONY FOR CANDLEMAS EVE.

DOWN with rosemary and bays,
Down with the mistletoe;*
Instead of holly, now upraise
The greener box, for show.

The holly hitherto did sway;
Let box now domineer,
Until the dancing Easter-day
Or Easter's eve appear.

Then youthful box, which now hath grace
Your houses to renew,
Grown old, surrender must his place
Unto the crispèd yew.

When yew is out, then birch comes in,
And many flowers beside,
Both of a fresh and fragrant kin,
To honour Whitsuntide.

Green rushes then, and sweetest bents,
With cooler oaken boughs,
Come in for comely ornaments,
To re-adorn the house.

Thus times do shift; each thing his turn does hold;
New things succeed as former things grow old.

* This is the first reference to the mistletoe, in its quality of a Christmas evergreen, that we have met with in the writings of our early poets.

CANDLEMAS EVE;

ANOTHER CEREMONY.

Down with the rosemary, and so
Down with the bays and mistletoe;
Down with the holly, ivy, all
Wherewith ye dressed the Christmas hall;
That so the superstitious find
No one least branch there left behind;
For look, how many leaves there be
Neglected there, maids, trust to me,
So many goblins you shall see.

CEREMONY FOR CANDLEMAS DAY.

Kindle the Christmas brand, and then
Till sunset let it burn;
Which quenched, then lay it up again,
Till Christmas next return.

Part must be kept, wherewith to tend
The Christmas log next year;
And where 't is safely kept, the fiend
Can do no mischief there.

In Herrick's time it was customary with the country people to prolong the merriment of the Christmas season until Candlemas Day—a circumstance referred to in the following couplet:—

CANDLEMAS DAY.

End now the white-loaf and the pie,
And let all sports with Christmas die.

"ALL plums the prophet's sons defy,
And spice broths are too hot;
Treason 's in a December pie,
And death within the pot.

Christmas, farewell! thy days, I fear,
Thy merry days are done:
So they may keep feasts all the year,
Our Saviour shall have none."

NEDHAM.

DIVISION IV.

CHRISTMAS SONGS AND CAROLS OF THE TIME OF THE CIVIL WARS, THE COMMONWEALTH, AND THE RESTORATION.

THE lively Christmas verses by Wither—written before his Puritanical zeal had developed itself—that open the present section of our work, introduce us to an amusing picture of the rejoicings of the season, ere the civil troubles of the reign of Charles I. had interfered, to throw a damper on the national hilarity. The holly and the ivy had not yet come to be regarded as emblems of Paganism. The Christmas log still blazed on the hospitable hearth, and music and dancing were far from being considered irrelevant and indecent amusements. The wassail bowl, too, was still in fashion, and even mumming was indulged in by both young men and maidens—

"With twenty other gambols mo,
Because they would be merry."

In the course of a few short years we find that penalties were enforced against parish officers for permitting the decking of churches, and even *for allowing divine service to be performed therein on Christmas morning;* and, to quote the words of old John Taylor, the water poet,—"All the liberty and harmless sports, the merry gambols, dances, and friscols, with which the toiling ploughman and labourer once a year were wont to be recreated, and their spirits and hopes revived for a whole twelvemonth, are now extinct and put out of use, in such a fashion as if they never had been. Thus are the merry lords of bad rule at Westminster; nay more, their madness hath extended itself to the very vegetables; the senseless trees, herbs, and weeds, are in a profane estimation amongst them—holly, ivy, mistletoe, rosemary, bays, are accounted ungodly branches of superstition for your entertainment. And to roast a sirloin of beef, to touch a collar of brawn, to take a pie, to put a plum in the pottage pot, to burn a great candle, or to lay one block the more in the fire for your sake, Master Christmas, is enough to

make a man to be suspected and taken for a Christian, for which he shall be apprehended for committing High Parliament Treason and mighty malignancy against the general Council of the Directorian private Presbyterian Conventicle."*

In another pamphlet, published a few years later, Taylor gives us a further insight into the doings of the Puritanical party. It would appear, however, that their efforts "to keep Christmas day out of England," as he expresses it, were unattended with success, so far as the rural districts were concerned. He brings forward old Father Christmas, who informs us that certain "hot, zealous brethren were of opinion that, from the 24th of December at night, till the 7th of January following, plum pottage was mere Popery, that a collar of brawn was an abomination, that roast beef was anti-christian, that mince pies were relics of the woman of Babylon, and a goose, a turkey, or a capon, were marks of the beast."

After a few words of remonstrance, "Christmas proceeds to describe his visit to a "grave, fox-furred mammonist," by whom he is received with anything but cordiality; and taking his departure, he makes his way into the country, where he meets with the "best and freest welcome from some kind country farmers: I will describe one," he observes, "for all the rest in Devonshire and Cornwall, where the goodman, with the dame of the house, and every body else, were exceeding glad to see me. and, with all country courtesy and solemnity, I was had into the parlour; there I was placed at the upper end of the table, and my company about me, we had good cheer and free welcome, and we were merry without music.

"After dinner we arose from the board and sat by the fire—where the hearth was embroidered all over with roasted apples, piping hot, expecting a bowl of ale for a cooler (which presently was transformed into warm lambswool). Within an hour after we went to church, where a good old minister spoke very reverendly of my Master, Christ, and also he uttered many good speeches concerning me, exciting and exhorting the people to love and unity one with another, and to extend their charities to the needy and distressed.

"After prayers we returned home, where we discoursed merrily, without either profaneness or obscenity; supper being ended, we went to cards; some sung carols and merry songs (suitable to the times); then the poor labouring hinds and the maid-servants, with the ploughboys, went nimbly to dancing, the poor toiling wretches being all glad of my company, because they had little or no sport at all till I came amongst them; and therefore they leaped and skipped for joy, singing a catch to the tune of hey,

"'Let 's dance and sing, and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year.'

Thus at active games and gambols of hotcockles, shoeing the wild mare, and the like harmless sports, some part of the tedious night was spent; and early in the morning we took our leaves of them thankfully; and though we had been thirteen days well entertained, yet the poor people

* The Complaint of Christmas, written after Twelftide, and printed before Candlemas, 1646.

were very unwilling to let me go; so I left them, quite out of hope to have my company again for a twelvemonth's space, that, if I were not banished in my absence, they should have my presence again next 25th of December, 1653."*

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

GEORGE WITHER.

O, now is come our joyful'st feast;
Let every man be jolly;
Each room with ivy leaves is drest,
And every post with holly.
Though some churls at our mirth repine,
Round your foreheads garlands twine;
Drown sorrow in a cup of wine,
And let us all be merry.

Now all our neighbours' chimneys smoke,
And Christmas blocks are burning;
Their ovens they with baked meats choke,
And all their spits are turning.

* "Christmas In and Out; or, Our Lord and Saviour Christ's Birthday," 1652.

Without the door let sorrow lie;
And if for cold it hap to die,
We 'll bury 't in a Christmas pie,
And ever more be merry.

Now every lad is wondrous trim,
And no man minds his labour;
Our lasses have provided them
A bag-pipe and a tabour;
Young men and maids, and girls and boys,
Give life to one another's joys;
And you anon shall by their noise
Perceive that they are merry.

Rank misers now do sparing shun;
Their hall of music soundeth;
And dogs thence with whole shoulders run,
So all things there aboundeth.
The country folks themselves advance
With crowdy-muttons* out of France;
And Jack shall pipe, and Jill shall dance,
And all the town be merry.

Ned Squash hath fetched his bands from pawn,
And all his best apparel;
Brisk Nell hath bought a ruff of lawn
With droppings of the barrel;
And those that hardly all the year
Had bread to eat, or rags to wear,
Will have both clothes and dainty fare,
And all the day be merry.

* Fiddlers.

Now poor men to the justices
With capons make their errants;*
And if they hap to fail of these,
They plague them with their warrants:
But now they feed them with good cheer,
And what they want they take in beer;
For Christmas comes but once a year,
And then they shall be merry.

* This was an old custom on the part of tenants to their landlords, which came to be followed by all the poorer sort who made their annual offering at the great man's shrine at this particular season of the year. Gascoigne, who wrote in the reign of Elizabeth, says —

"And when the tenants come to pay their quarter's rent,
They bring some fowl at Midsummer, a dish of fish in Lent,
At Christmas a capon, at Michaelmas a goose,
And somewhat else at New Year's tide, for fear their lease fly loose."

And Bishop Hall, in his Satires, has the following allusion to the circumstance: —

"Yet must he haunt his greedy landlord's hall,
With often presents at each festival;
With crammed capons every New Year's morn,
Or with green cheeses when his sheep are shorn."

Good farmers in the country nurse
The poor that else were undone;
Some landlords spend their money worse,
On lust and pride at London.
There the roysters they do play,
Drab and dice their lands away,
Which may be ours another day;
And therefore let's be merry.

The client now his suit forbears,
The prisoner's heart is eased:
The debtor drinks away his cares,
And for the time is pleased.
Though other purses be more fat,
Why should we pine or grieve at that?
Hang sorrow! care will kill a cat,
And therefore let's be merry.

Hark! how the wags abroad do call
Each other forth to rambling:
Anon you 'll see them in the hall
For nuts and apples scrambling.
Hark! how the roofs with laughter sound!
Anon they 'll think the house goes round;
For they the cellar's depth have found,
And there they will be merry.

The wenches with their wassail bowls
About the streets are singing;
The boys are come to catch the owls,
The wild mare in is bringing.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

Our kitchen-boy hath broke his box,*
And to the dealing of the ox
Our honest neighbours come by flocks,
And here they will be merry.

Now kings and queens poor sheep cotes have,
And mate with every body;
The honest now may play the knave,
And wise men play the noddy.
Some youths will now a mumming go,
Some others play at Rowland-ho,
And twenty other gambols mo,
Because they will be merry.

Then wherefore in these merry days
Should we, I pray, be duller?
No, let us sing some roundelays,
To make our mirth the fuller.
And, whilst thus inspired we sing,
Let all the streets with echoes ring,
Woods and hills, and every thing,
Bear witness we are merry.

George Wither will be remembered as the author of many tender and graceful poems, some few of which invariably find a place in every collection of early poetry. He was one of those uncompromising spirits, formed by and for the age in which they live. He supported the cause of the Parliament with his satiric pen and good broadswoard. He sold his estate to raise a regiment, and was made a major-general by Cromwell in return. The Restoration stripped him of everything he possessed; still this was only a part of his misfortunes, for he was shortly afterwards imprisoned in the Tower on a charge of sedition, and, to increase his punishment, pens, ink, and paper were denied him. When he obtained his liberty is not known; he lived, however, to the good old age of seventy-nine, closing his troublous worldly career on May 2, 1667.

* This alludes to the Christmas money-box, made of earthenware, which required to be broken to obtain possession of the money it held.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

GEORGE WITHER.

As on the night before this happy morn,
A blessed angel unto shepherds told,
Where (in a stable) He was poorly born,
Whom nor the earth, nor heaven of heavens can hold:
Through Bethlem rung
This news at their return;
Yea, angels sung
That God with us was born;
And they made mirth because we should not mourn.

Their angel-carol sing we then,
To God on high all glory be,
For peace on earth bestoweth He,
And showeth favour unto men.

This favour Christ vouchsafèd for our sake;
To buy us thrones, He in a manger lay;
Our weakness took, that we His strength might take;
And was disrobed that He might us array:
Our flesh He wore,
Our sin to wear away;
Our curse He bore,
That we escape it may;
And wept for us, that we might sing for aye.

With angels, therefore, sing again,
To God on high all glory be;
For peace on earth bestoweth He,
And showeth favour unto men.

HYMN TO THE NATIVITY.

JOHN MILTON.

It was the winter wild,
While the heaven-born child
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies:
Nature, in awe to Him,
Had doffed her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun, her lusty paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air,
To hide her guilty front with innocent snow;
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw;
Confounded, that her Maker's eyes,
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

But He, her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;
She, crowned with olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous cloud dividing;
And, waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around:

The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hookèd chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by.

But peaceful was the night,
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kissed,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave.

The stars, with deep amaze,
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,
Bending one way their precious influence;
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
Or Lucifer that often warned them thence;
But in their glimmering orbs did glow,
Until their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

And, though the shady gloom
Had given day her room,
The sun himself withheld his wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferior flame
The new enlightened world no more should need:
He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright throne, or burning axletree, could bear.

The shepherds on the lawn,
Or ere the point of dawn,
Sat simply chatting in a rustic row:
Full little thought they then,
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet,
As never was by mortal finger strook;
Divinely-warbled voice
Answering the stringed noise,
As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close.

Nature, that heard such sound,
Beneath the hollow round
Of Cynthia's seat, the airy region thrilling,
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all heaven and earth in happier union.

At last surrounds their sight
A globe of circular light,
That with long beams the shame-faced night arrayed;
The helmèd cherubim,
And sworded seraphim,
Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,

Harping in loud and solemn choir,
With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's new born Heir.

Such music (as 't is said)
Before was never made,
But when of old the sons of morning sung,
While the Creator great
His constellations set,
And the well-balanced world on hinges hung;
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their oozy channel keep.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears,

If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

For, if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold;
And speckled vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould;
And hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea, truth and justice then
Will down return to men,
Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
Mercy will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering;
And heaven, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.

But wisest Fate says No,
This must not yet be so;
The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss;
So both himself and us to glorify:
Yet first, to those enchained in sleep,
The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through the deep.

With such a horrid clang
As on Mount Sinai rang,
While the red fire and smouldering clouds outbrake:
The aged earth, aghast
With terror of that blast,
Shall from the surface to the centre shake;
When, at the world's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread his throne.

And then at last our bliss,
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for from this happy day,
The old dragon under ground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurpèd sway;
And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly horror of his folded tail.

The oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathèd spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale,
Edgèd with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent;

With flower-inwoven tresses torn,
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

In consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth,
The Lars and Lemures moan with midnight plaint;
In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the Flamens at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.

Peor and Baalim
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-battered God of Palestine;
And moonèd Ashtaroth,
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine;
The Libyc Hammon shrinks his horn,
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn.

And sullen Moloch, fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with cymbals' ring,
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste.

Nor is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove, or green,
Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud:

Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest;
Nought but profoundest hell can be his shroud;
In vain, with timbrelled anthems dark,
The sable-stoled sorcerers bear his worshipped ark.

He feels from Judah's land
The dreaded Infant's hand,
The rays of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn;
Nor all the Gods beside
Longer dare abide,
Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine;
Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
Can in his swaddling bands control the damnèd crew.

So, when the Sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fettered ghost slips to his several grave;
And the yellow-skirted fays,
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved maze.

But see, the Virgin blest,
Hath laid her Babe to rest;
Time is, our tedious song should here have ending:
Heaven's youngest-teemèd star
Hath fixed her polished car,
Her sleeping Lord, with handmaid lamp, attending:
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable.

Crashaw, the author of the annexed hymn, was the son of a clergyman of the Church of England, and received his education at Cambridge; after taking his degree, he became a fellow of Peterhouse College. Refusing, however, to subscribe to the parliamentary covenant, he was ejected from his fellowship, when he proceeded to France and embraced the Roman Catholic faith. His conversion probably arose from interested motives, as, having been recommended to Henrietta Maria by his friend Cowley the poet, a canonry in the Church of Loretto was conferred on him. This dignity he only lived to enjoy for a short time, as he died of a fever in 1650, soon after his induction.

HYMN OF THE NATIVITY,

SUNG BY THE SHEPHERDS.

RICHARD CRASHAW.

COME we shepherds, whose blest sight
Hath met Love's noon in Nature's night;
Come lift we up our loftier song,
And wake the sun that lies too long.

To all our world of well-stoll'n joy,
He slept, and dreamt of no such thing;
While we found out Heaven's fairer eye,
And kissed the cradle of our King;
Tell him he rises now too late
To show us ought worth looking at.

Tell him we now can show him more
Than he e'er showed to mortal sight,—
Than he himself e'er saw before,—
Which to be seen needs not his light;
Tell him, Tityrus, where th' hast been;
Tell him, Thyrsis, what th' hast seen.

Tit. Gloomy night embraced the place
Where the noble infant lay;

The Babe looked up and shewed his face,
In spite of darkness it was day—
It was thy day, Sweet! and did rise,
Not from the East, but from Thine eyes.

Thyrs. Winter chid aloud, and sent
The angry North to wage his wars;
The North forgot his fierce intent,
And left perfumes instead of scars:
By those sweet eyes' persuasive powers,
Where he meant frost, he scattered flowers.

Both. We saw Thee in Thy balmy nest,
Bright dawn of our eternal day!
We saw Thine eyes break from their East,
And chase the trembling shades away:
We saw Thee, and we blessed the sight,—
We saw Thee by Thine own sweet light.

Tit. Poor world, said I, what wilt thou do
To entertain this starry Stranger?
Is this the best thou canst bestow,
A cold, and not too cleanly, manger?
Contend, ye powers of heaven and earth,
To fit a bed for this huge birth.

Thyrs. Proud world, said I, cease your contest,
And let the mighty Babe alone;
The phœnix build the phœnix' nest,
Love's architecture is all one:
The Babe whose birth embraves this morn,
Made His own bed ere He was born.

Tit. I saw the curled drops, soft and slow,
Come hovering o'er the place's head,
Offering their whitest sheets of snow,
To furnish the fair Infant's bed:
Forbear, said I, be not too bold,
Your fleece is white, but 't is too cold.

Thyrs. I saw the obsequious seraphims
Their rosy fleece of fire bestow,
For well they now can spare their wings,
Since Heaven itself lies here below:
Well done, said I; but are you sure
Your down so warm will pass for pure?

Tit. No, no, your King 's not yet to seek
Where to repose His royal head;
See, see, how soon His new-bloomed cheek
'Twixt mother's breasts is gone to bed.
Sweet choice, said I, no way but so
Not to lie cold, yet sleep in snow.

Both. We saw Thee in thy balmy nest,
Bright dawn of our eternal day;
We saw Thine eyes break from their east,
And chase the trembling shades away.
We saw Thee, and we blessed the sight;
We saw Thee by Thine own sweet light.

The following poem is by Bishop Jeremy Taylor, whose eloquent prose writings cause him to be regarded as one of the ornaments of the English Church. He was a man of singular humility and piety, and irreproachable in all the duties of life. During the civil troubles, he warmly attached himself to the cause of Charles I., one of whose chap-

lains he had been, and suffered imprisonment in consequence. He lived to lend the lustre of his name to the era following the Restoration, when a depraved monarch, and a licentious court, had banished both religious and moral purity beyond the circle of their pernicious influence.

OF CHRIST'S BIRTH IN AN INN.

JEREMY TAYLOR.

THE blessèd Virgin travailed without pain,
And lodgèd in an inn,
A glorious star the sign,
But of a greater guest than ever came that way,
For there He lay
That is the God of night and day,
And over all the pow'rs of heav'n doth reign.
It was the time of great Augustus' tax,
And then He comes
That pays all sums,
Even the whole price of lost humanity;
And sets us free
From the ungodly emperie
Of Sin, of Satan, and of Death.
Oh, make our hearts, blest God, Thy lodging-place!
And in our breast
Be pleased to rest,
For Thou lov'st temples better than an inn,
And cause that Sin
May not profane the Deity within,
And sully o'er the ornaments of grace.

CAROL.

(From "New Carols for this Merry Time of Christmas," 1661.)

ALL you that in this house be here,
Remember Christ, that for us died;
And spend away with modest cheer
In loving sort this Christmas tide.

And, whereas plenty God hath sent,
Give frankly to your friends in love:
The bounteous mind is freely bent,
And never will a niggard prove.

Our table spread within the hall,
I know a banquet is at hand,
And friendly sort to welcome all
That will unto their tacklings stand.

The maids are bonny girls, I see,
Who have provided much good cheer,
Which, at my dame's commandment be
Now set upon the table here.

And I have here two knives in store,
To lend to him that wanteth one;
Commend my wits, good lads, therefore,
That come now hither having none.

For, if I should, no Christmas pie
Would fall, I doubt, unto my share;
Wherefore, I will my manhood try,
To fight a battle if I dare.

For pastry-crust, like castle walls,
Stands braving me unto my face;
I am not well until it falls,
And I made captain of the place.

The prunes so lovely, look on me,
I cannot choose but venture on:
The pie-meat spicèd brave I see,
The which I must not let alone.

Then, butler, fill me forth some beer,
My song hath made me somewhat dry;
And so, again, to this good cheer,
I 'll quickly fall, courageously.

And for my master I will pray,
With all that of his household are,
Both old and young, that long we may
Of God's good blessings have a share.

CHRISTMAS SONG.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1695.)

NOW thrice welcome Christmas,
Which brings us good cheer,
Minced pies and plum porridge,
Good ale and strong beer;
With pig, goose, and capon,
The best that can be.
So well doth the weather
And our stomachs agree.

Observe how the chimneys
Do smoke all about,
The cooks are providing
For dinner, no doubt;
But those on whose tables
No victuals appear,
O may they keep Lent
All the rest of the year!

With holly and ivy
So green and so gay;
We deck up our houses
As fresh as the day,
With bays and rosemary.
And laurel complete,
And every one now
Is a king in conceit.

CAROL.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1700.)

Now that the time is come wherein
Our Saviour Christ was born,
The larders full of beef and pork,
And garners filled with corn;

As God hath plenty to thee sent,
Take comfort of thy labours,
And let it never thee repent
To feast thy needy neighbours.

Let fires in every chimney be,
That people they may warm them;
Tables with dishes covered,
Good victuals will not harm them.

With mutton, veal, beef, pig, and pork
Well furnish every board,
Plum-pudding, furmity, and what
Thy stock will then afford.

No niggard of the liquor be,
Let it go round thy table,
People may freely drink, but not
So long as they are able;

Good customs they may be abused,
Which makes rich men so slack us,
This feast is to relieve the poor,
And not to drunken Bacchus.

Thus if thou doest, 't will credit raise thee,
God will thee bless, and neighbours praise thee.

The burthen of the following excellent old ballad is that lament, common in all ages, for the days that have passed away. Looking back on bygone times, the imagination, charmed with the novelty which surrounds every minute circumstance, exalts even the worst features into matter for admiration. We very much question the amount of happiness enjoyed by the people generally, when every nobleman usurped the power of a petty sovereign, and had a crew of lusty men at his command to do his individual bidding. This state of things could certainly not have tended to promote the public peace in those highly prized "days of yore, when the old cap was new."

THE OLD CAP, OR TIME'S ALTERATION.

WHEN this old cap was new,
'T is since two hundred year,
No malice then we knew,
But all things plenty were:
All friendship now decays
(Believe me, this is true),
Which was not in those days,
When this old cap was new.

The nobles of our land
Were much delighted then,
To have at their command
A crew of lusty men,

Which by their coats were known,
Of tawny, red, or blue,
With crests on their sleeves shown,
When this old cap was new.

Now pride hath banished all,
Unto our land's reproach,
When he whose means are small
Maintains both horse and coach;
Instead of an hundred men,
The coach allows but two:
This was not thought on then,
When this old cap was new.

Good hospitality
Was cherished then of many;
Now poor men starve and die,
And are not helped by any;
For charity waxeth cold,
And love is found in few:
This was not in time of old,
When this old cap was new.

Wherever you travelled then,
You might meet on the way
Brave knights and gentlemen,
Clad in their country grey,
That courteous would appear,
And kindly welcome you:
No puritans then were,
When this old cap was new.

Our ladies, in those days,
In civil habit went;
Broad-cloth was then worth praise,
And gave the best content;
French fashions then were scorned;
Fond fangles then none knew;
Then modesty women adorned,
When this old cap was new.

The holly tree was polled
At Christmas for each hall;
There was fire to curb the cold,
And meat for great and small:
The neighbours were friendly bidden,
And all had welcome true;
The poor from the gates were not chidden,
When this old cap was new.

Black jacks to every man
Were filled with wine and beer;
No pewter pot nor can
Did in those days appear.
Good cheer in a nobleman's house
Was counted a seemly show;
We wanted no brawn nor souse,
When this old cap was new.

We took not such delight
In cups of silver fine;
None under degree of a knight
In plate drunk beer or wine

Now each mechanical man
Hath a cupboard of plate for show:
Which was a rare thing then,
When this old cap was new.

God save our gracious king,
Oh, send him long to live!
And mischief on them bring
That will not their alms give;
But seek to rob the poor
Of that which is their due:
This was not in time of yore,
When this old cap was new.

We have been unable to trace the original source from whence the following old ballad has been derived; but in all probability it was written just after the Restoration, when the limits, within which the festivities of the season had been confined by the over-zealous Puritans, were overstepped, and something like a revival of the old hospitality began to show itself. A paragraph, which appears to form a regular accompaniment of the old ballad, describes it to be "a looking-glass for rich misers, wherein they may see (if not blind) how much they are to blame for their penurious housekeeping; and likewise an encouragement to those noble-minded gentry, who lay out a great part of their estate in hospitality, relieving such persons as have need thereof.

Who feasts the poor, a true reward shall find,
Or helps the old, the feeble, lame, and blind."

OLD CHRISTMAS RETURNED.

All you that to feasting and mirth are inclined,
Come here is good news for to pleasure your mind,
Old Christmas is come for to keep open house,
He scorns to be guilty of starving a mouse!
Then come, boys, and welcome for diet the chief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

A long time together he hath been forgot,
They scarce could afford for to hang on the pot;
Such miserly sneaking in England hath been,
As by our forefathers ne'er used to be seen;
But now he 's returnèd you shall have, in brief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The times were ne'er good since old Christmas was fled,
And all hospitality hath been so dead,
No mirth at our festivals late did appear,
They scarcely would part with a cup of March beer;
But now you shall have, for the ease of your grief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The butler and baker, they now may be glad,
The times they are mended, though they have been bad;
The brewer, he likewise may be of good cheer,
He shall have good trading for ale and strong beer;
All trades shall be jolly, and have, for relief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The holly and ivy about the walls wind,
And show that we ought to our neighbours be kind,
Inviting each other for pastime and sport,
And where we best fare, there we most do resort.
We fail not for victuals, and that of the chief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The cooks shall be busied by day and by night
In roasting and boiling, for taste and delight;
Their senses in liquor that 's nappy they 'll steep,
Though they be afforded to have little sleep;

They still are employed for to dress us, in brief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Although the cold weather doth hunger provoke,
'T is a comfort to see how the chimneys do smoke;
Provision is making for beer, ale, and wine,
For all that are willing or ready to dine;
Then haste to the kitchen, for diet the chief—
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

All travellers, as they do pass on their way,
At gentlemen's halls are invited to stay,
Themselves to refresh, and their horses to rest,
Since that he must be Old Christmas's guest;
Nay, the poor shall not want, but have, for relief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Now Mock-beggar Hall it no more shall stand empty,
But all shall be furnished with freedom and plenty;
The hoarding old misers, who used to preserve
The gold in their coffers, and see the poor starve,
Must now spread their tables, and give them, in brief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The court, and the city, and country are glad
Old Christmas is come to cheer up the sad;
Broad pieces and guineas about now shall fly,
And hundreds be losers by cogging a die,
Whilst others are feasting with diet the chief—
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Those that have no coin at the cards for to play,
May sit by the fire and pass time away,

And drink of their moisture contented and free—
" My honest good fellow, come, here is to thee !"
And when they are hungry, full to their relief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Young gallants and ladies shall foot it along,
Each room in the house to the music shall throng,
Whilst jolly carouses about they shall pass,
And each country swain trip about with his lass;
Meantime goes the caterer to fetch in the chief—
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

The cooks and the scullion, who toil in their frocks,
Their hopes do depend upon their Christmas-box;
There are very few that do live on the earth
But enjoy at this time either profit or mirth;
Yea, those that are charged to find all relief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Then well may we welcome Old Christmas to town,
Who brings us good cheer, and good liquor so brown,
To pass the cold winter away with delight.
We feast it all day, and we frolic all night;
Both hunger and cold we keep out with relief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

Then let all curmudgeons, who dote on their wealth,
And value their treasure much more than their health,
Go hang themselves up, if they will be so kind,
Old Christmas with them but small welcome shall find:
They will not afford to themselves, without grief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced pies, and roast beef.

WASSAILING FRUIT TREES.

The custom of Wassailing the fruit trees on the eve of Twelfth-day has been before alluded to. It seems to have been the practice, on the part of the Devonshire farmers, to proceed to their orchards in the evening, accompanied by their farm servants, and carrying with them a large pitcher or milk-pail filled with cyder, with roasted apples hissing therein. They forthwith encircled one of the best bearing trees, and drunk the following toast three times. The remains of the wassailing liquor was then thrown against the trees, under the idea that a fruitful year would be the result.

"Here's to thee, old apple-tree,
Whence thou may'st bud, and thou may'st blow!
And whence thou may'st bear apples enow!
Hats full! caps full!
Bushel—bushel—sacks full!
And my pockets full too! Huzza!"

Two out of the three subjoined Carols will be recognised as old familiar friends. Though in all probability more than a century and a-half old, they are the Carols of the People even at the present day, and, independent of their claim on this score, to be admitted into the present work, there is a pleasing simplicity about the one, and a quaintness pervading the other, sufficient to cause them to be admired in spite of their commonness.

GOD REST YOU, MERRY GENTLEMEN.

GOD rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born upon this day;
To save us all from Satan's power,
When we were gone astray.

O tidings of comfort and joy, [Day.
For Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas

In Bethlehem in Jewry
This blessed babe was born,
And laid within a manger
Upon this blessed morn;
The which his mother Mary
Nothing did take in scorn.
O tidings, &c.

From God, our Heavenly Father,
A blessed Angel came,
And, unto certain shepherds,
Brought tidings of the same;
How, that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name.
O tidings, &c.

Fear not, then said the Angel,
Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Saviour,
Of virtue, power, and might,
So frequently to vanquish all
The friends of Satan quite.
O tidings, &c.

The Shepherds at those tidings,
Rejoicèd much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding
In tempest, storm, and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
This blessed Babe to find.
O tidings, &c.

But when to Bethlehem they came,
Where as this infant lay,

They found Him in a manger
Where oxen feed on hay,
His mother Mary kneeling
Unto the Lord did pray.
O tidings, &c.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace,
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface.
O tidings, &c.

CAROL, WITH LULLABY.

Lulla, la lulla, lulla lullaby,
My sweet little baby, what meanest thou to cry?
Be still, my blessed babe, though cause thou hast to mourn,
Whose blood, most innocent, the cruel king hath sworn:
And lo, alas, behold what slaughter he doth make,
Shedding the blood of infants all, sweet Saviour, for thy sake:
A king is born, they say, which king this king would kill;
Oh wo, and woful heavy day, when wretches have their will.

Lulla, la lulla, lulla lullaby, &c.
Three kings this King of kings to see, are come from far,
To each unknown, with offerings great, by guiding of a star!
And shepherds heard the song, which angels bright did sing,
Giving all glory unto God, for coming of this king.
Which must be made away, King Herod would him kill;
Oh wo, and woful heavy day, when wretches have their will.

Lulla, la lulla, lulla lullaby, &c.
Lo, my little babe, be still, lament no more,
From fury shalt thou step aside, help have we still in store;
We heavenly warning have, some other soil to seek,
From death must fly the Lord of Life, as lamb both mild and meek:
Thus must my babe obey the king that would him kill,
Oh wo, and woful heavy day, when wretches have their will.

Lulla, la lulla, lulla lullaby, &c.
But thou shalt live and reign, as sybils have foresaid,
As all the prophets prophesy, whose mother, yet a maid,
And perfect virgin pure, with her breasts shall up-breed
Both God and man, that all have made the son of heavenly seed:
Whom caitiffs none can 'tray, whom tyrants none can kill,
Oh, joy, and joyful happy day, when wretches want their will.

I SAW THREE SHIPS.

I SAW three ships come sailing in
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And what was in those ships all three,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?
And what was in those ships all three,
On Christmas Day in the morning?

Our Saviour Christ and his ladye,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
Our Saviour Christ and his ladye,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?
Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas Day in the morning?

O they sailed into Bethlehem,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
O they sailed into Bethlehem,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the bells on Earth shall ring,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
And all the bells on Earth shall ring,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the angels in Heaven shall sing,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
And all the angels in Heaven shall sing,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And all the souls on Earth shall sing,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
And all the souls on Earth shall sing,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Then let us all rejoice amain,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
Then let us all rejoice amain,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

"AT Christmas time, send up the brawner's head,
Sweet rosemary and bays around it spread:
His foaming tusks let some large pippin grace,
Or, 'midst those thundering spears an orange place;
Sauce like himself, offensive to its foes,
The roguish mustard, dangerous to the nose.
Sack, and the well-spiced hippocras, the wine,
Wassail the bowl with ancient ribbands fine,
Porridge with plums, and turkeys with the chine."

WM. KING.

DIVISION V.

CHRISTMAS VERSES OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

EW poems bearing reference to the Christmas festival appear to have been produced during that era of the revival of English literature, which, from the brilliant circle of writers it gave birth to, has acquired the epithet of Augustan. Yet, nevertheless, much of the old Christmas hospitality, and many of the old Christmas observances, that have been dwelt upon in preceding pages of this work, still lingered behind, in many a quiet country place, as though loth to depart; and, perhaps, the picture which Addison sketched of Coverley Hall at Christmas time* is as faithful a representation of the hospitality practised by the country gentlemen of the period as can be met with. He tells us that "Sir Roger de Coverley adopted the laudable custom of his ancestors, in keeping open house at Christmas. He had killed eight fat hogs for that season, had dealt about his chines very liberally amongst his neighbours, and, in particular, he had sent a string of hogs' puddings, with a pack of cards, to every poor family in the parish. 'I have often thought,' said Sir Roger, 'it happens very well that Christmas should fall out in the middle of winter. It is the most dead, uncomfortable time of the year, when the poor people would suffer very much from their poverty, and cold, if they had not good cheer, warm fires, and Christmas gambols to support them. I love to rejoice their poor hearts at this season, and to see the whole village merry in my great hall. I allow a double quantity of malt to my small beer, and set it a running for twelve days to every one that calls for it.

* Spectator, No. 269, 1711.

I have always a piece of cold beef, and a mince pie upon the table, and am wonderfully pleased to see my tenants pass away a whole evening in playing their tricks, and smutting one another.'" We learn from the same authority,* that one of the favourite Christmas gambols on such an occasion as that above described, was yawning for a Cheshire cheese. The proceeding generally began about midnight, when the whole company were disposed to be drowsy, and he that yawned the widest, and, at the same time, so naturally as to produce the most yawns among the spectators, was proclaimed the victor, and carried home the cheese as his reward.

THE APPROACH OF CHRISTMAS.†

JOHN GAY.

WHEN rosemary, and bays, the poets' crown,
Are bawled, in frequent cries, through all the town;
Then judge the festival of Christmas near,—
Christmas, the joyous period of the year.

* Spectator, No. 179, 1711. † From "Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London."

Now with bright holly all your temples strew,
With laurel green, and sacred mistletoe.*
Now, heaven-born Charity! thy blessings shed;
Bid meagre Want uprear her sickly head;
Bid shivering limbs be warm; let Plenty's bowl
In humble roofs make glad the needy soul!
See, see! the heaven-born maid her blessings shed;
Lo! meagre Want uprears her sickly head;
Clothed are the naked, and the needy glad,
While selfish Avarice alone is sad.

ON CHRISTMAS.

JOHN BAMPFYLDE.

With footstep slow, in furry pall yclad,
His brows enwreathed with holly never sere,
Old Christmas comes, to close the wanèd year,
And aye the shepherd's heart to make right glad;
Who, when his teeming flocks are homeward had,
To blazing hearth repairs, and nut-brown beer;
And views, well pleased, the ruddy prattlers dear
Hug the grey mongrel; meanwhile, maid and lad
Squabble for roasted crabs. Thee, sire, we hail,
Whether thine aged limbs thou dost enshroud
In vest of snowy white and hoary veil,
Or wrapp'st thy visage in a sable cloud;
Thee we proclaim with mirth and cheer, nor fail
To greet thee well with many a carol loud.

* In the *Spectator*, No. 282, 1711, is a pretended letter from a young lady on this subject. She observes:—"Our clerk, who was once a gardener, has this Christmas so overdone the church with greens that, as now equipped, it looks more like a greenhouse than a place of worship. The middle aisle is a very pretty shady walk, and the pews look like so many arbours on each side of it. The pulpit itself has such clusters of ivy, holly, and rosemary about it, that a light fellow in our pew took occasion to say that the congregation heard the word out of a bush, like Moses."

The annexed descriptions of the various features of the Christmas season are extracted from a poem of considerable length, entitled "Christmas," written by Romaine Joseph Thorn, and published towards the close of the eighteenth century. As we have been unable to meet with a copy of this poem, our extracts have been made from Brand's "Popular Antiquities," vol. i., and comprise, of course, only such passages as are printed in that work.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

THY welcome eve, loved Christmas, now arrived,
The parish bells their tuneful peals resound,
And mirth and gladness every breast pervade.
The pond'rous ashen faggot, from the yard,
The jolly farmer to his crowded hall
Conveys, with speed; where, on the rising flames
(Already fed with store of massy brands)
It blazes soon; nine bandages it bears;
And as they each disjoin (so custom wills),
A mighty jug of sparkling cyder 's brought,
With brandy mixed, to elevate the guests.

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL.

Now too is heard
The hapless cripple, tuning through the streets
His Carol new; and oft, amid the gloom
Of midnight hours, prevailed th' accustomed sounds
Of wakeful Waits, whose melody (composed
Of hautboy, organ, violin and flute,
And various other instruments of mirth,)
Is meant to celebrate the coming time.

The next extract refers to the indoor amusements of the Christmas season, most of which will be recognised as popular at the present time, in many a quiet country place, among those who still retain a fondness for the simple games that delighted alike both old and young in the bygone days of ruffles and farthingales.

CHRISTMAS SPORTS.

YOUNG men and maidens now
At Feed the Dove (with laurel leaf in mouth),
Or Blindman's Buff, or Hunt the Slipper, play,
Replete with glee. Some, haply, cards adopt:
Or if to Forfeits they the sport confine,
The happy folk adjacent to the fire
Their stations take; excepting one alone,
(Sometimes the social mistress of the house)
Who sits within the centre of the room,
To cry the pawns; much is the laughter now,
At such as can't the Christmas catch repeat,
And who, perchance, are sentenced to salute

The jetty beauties of the chimney back,
Or lady's shoe; others more lucky far,
By hap or favour meet a sweeter doom,
And on each fair one's lovely lips imprint
The ardent kiss.

EVERGREEN-DECKING AT CHRISTMAS.

From every hedge is plucked by eager hands
The holly branch, with prickly leaves replete,
And fraught with berries of a crimson hue;
Which, torn asunder from its parent trunk,
Is straightway taken to the neighbouring towns;
Where windows, mantles, candlesticks, and shelves,
Quarts, pints, decanters, pipkins, basins, jugs,
And other articles of household ware,
The verdant garb confess.

THE CHRISTMAS BOX.

Gladly the boy, with Christmas Box in hand,
Throughout the town his devious route pursues;
And, of his master's customers, implores
The yearly mite: often his cash he shakes;
The which, perchance, of coppers few consists,
Whose dulcet jingle fills his little soul
With joy, as boundless as the debtor feels,
When, from the bailiff's rude, uncivil gripe,
His friends redeem him, and, with pity fraught,
The claims of all his creditors discharge.

THE CHRISTMAS FEAST.

Now social friends their social friends invite
To share the feast: and on the table 's placed
The famed sirloin, with puddings nicely baked,
Surcharged with plums, and from the oven hot;
Nor wanting are minced pies, in plenteous heaps,
T' augment the dainties of the brave repast.

Having disposed of the few poems belonging to this section, that we have succeeded in meeting with, written by acknowledged authors, we now proceed to introduce several of an anonymous character. Our first selection is from "Poor Robin's Almanack;" and, although these verses are of but a humble order of merit, they are still interesting, as exhibiting the particular features of the Christmas season during a considerable portion of the eighteenth century.

THE GOOD OLD TIMES.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1709.)

OW happy were those days so old,
When feasting did all twelve days hold;
When tables groaned with boiled and roast,
And key of buttery door was lost;
When cooks had hardly time to eat,
For serving up of others' meat;
When the old hall with gambols rung,
And merry carols they were sung;
While many tales and jests were saying,
Some were at Whisk and Cross Ruff playing,
Primevo, Gleek, Picquet, All Fours,
In harmless mirth they spent the hours;

Knaves out of Town who may not hurt ye,
And Tom-fool's game called One and Thirty,
Winning and Losing, Loudum, Put,
Then Post and Pair, and next New Cut.*
Some were a shoeing the wild mare.
With other tricks that usèd were.
But those things now are laid aside,
The better to maintain our pride,
And Christmas scarcely should we know,
Did not the almanacks it show.

A HINT TO THE FANATICS.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1711.)

Now Christmas day approaches near,
Trim up the house with holly,
And set abroach the strongest beer,
For neighbours to be jolly.
Let fanatics old customs blame,
Yet Christmas is a High day,
Though they will fast upon the same,
And feast upon Good Friday.

Good works are popishly inclined,
Say they that none will do,
Yet they for pride can money find,
And keep a coach also.

* All the above were games with cards, and several among them will be recognised as popular at the present day.

Thus, that which should relieve the poor,
And feast them at this tide,
Is spent upon a coach and four,
To maintain foolish pride.

Yet some there are, although but few,
In whom more goodness lurks,
Who, to the poor will pity show,
And show their faith by works.
I wish, for one, that these were twain,
And knaves away all swept,
That honest Christians, once again,
With feasting may be kept.

SUMMER TOIL AND WINTER CHEER.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1724.)

Now after all our slaving, toiling,
In harvest or hot weather broiling,
The scorching weather 's gone and past,
And shivering winter's come at last.
Good fires will now do very well,
For Christmas cheer begins to smell.
Those that in summer laboured hard,
Are for a Christmas storm prepared;
And from their store are able now
To feast themselves, and neighbours too,
With pork and mutton, veal and beef—
Of country feasting these are chief;
But those that yet would farther go,
May have a hollow bit or so,

Pig, capon, turkey, goose, and coney,
Whatever may be had for money;
Plum-pudding, cheese, and furmity,
With pasty, tarts, and Christmas pie;
Good nappy ale, or humming beer,
Suits very well to such good cheer.
Such plenteous living's their enjoyment,
Who truly follow their employment,
While slothful, lurking, idle drones
Do scarce deserve to pick the bones.

LABOUR'S REWARD.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1728.)

THE short cold days, and long cold nights,
The people to the fire invites.
Now happy they who furnished are,
And did, in summer-time prepare
For victuals, drink, and good hot fires,
All which this season now requires.
If geese and sheep with care were bred,
And, in their season, duly fed—
If, at the proper time of year,
You from the sheep the wool did shear—
And if you afterwards begun
To have it carded, have it spun,
And wove, and put upon your back—
You'll be warm dressed when others lack.
If you October beer did brew,
You have the credit of it now,
And pleasure of the drinking too.

Provide good cheer, yourselves enjoy,
And all your needless cares destroy
With harmless mirth, and best of cheer,
Good wine, or ale, or humming beer,
And merry Christmas crown the year.

CHRISTMAS PAST AND PRESENT.

(From "Poor Robin's Almanack," 1739.)

Now Christmas comes with frost and snow,
When men do feast, or should do so;
When lusty diet, and the bowl
Should round about the table troll,
And cooks prepare their poignant meat
To teach the palate how to eat,
And every dish invites the sight
To a new hungry appetite;
The while musicians sing and play,
With mirth to drive the time away.
For mirth, being mixèd with our meat,
Gives better appetite to eat.

But now the times are altered so,
When Christmas is, we scarce can know
But for these two things put together,—
Men's hearts are hard, so is the weather.
But which are hardest of the two?
Men's hearts are, without more ado.
O, may those who have richest store,
And do refuse to feast the poor,

Whilst they are served with every dish
That coin can buy, or heart can wish—
O may they still have store of meat,
But stomach none, the same to eat.

WASSAILER'S SONG.

(From Brand's "Popular Antiquities.")

Wassail! Wassail! all over the town,
Our toast it is white, our ale it is brown:
Our bowl it is made of a maplin tree,
We be good fellows all—I drink to thee.

Here 's to Dobbin, and to his right ear,
God send our master a happy New Year;
A happy New Year as e'er he did see—
With my Wassailing Bowl I drink to thee.

Here 's to Smiler, and to his right eye,
God send our mistress a good Christmas pie;
As good Christmas pie as e'er I did see—
With my Wassailing Bowl I drink to thee.

Here 's to Fillpail, and to her long tail,
God send our master us never may fail
Of a cup of good beer: I pray you draw near,
And our jolly Wassail it 's then you shall hear.

Be here any maids? I suppose there be some—
Sure they 'll not let young men stand on the cold stone;
Sing hey O maids, come trole back the pin,
And the fairest maid in the house let us in.

Come, butler, come bring us a bowl of the best,
And I 'll hope your soul in heaven will rest:
But if you do bring us a bowl of the small,
Then down may fall butler, and bowl, and all.

CHRISTMAS IS A COMING.

(From "Round about our Coal Fire," 1734.)

YOU merry, merry souls,
Christmas is a coming;
We shall have flowing bowls,
Dancing, piping, drumming.

Delicate minced pies,
To feast every virgin,
Capon and goose likewise,
Brawn, and dish of sturgeon.

Then for your Christmas-box
Sweet plum-cakes and money,
Delicate Holland smocks,
Kisses sweet as honey.

Hey for the Christmas ball,
Where we shall be jolly;
Coupling short and tall,
Kate, Dick, Ralph, and Molly.

Then to the hop we 'll go,
Where we 'll jig and caper;
Dancers all a-row,
Will shall pay the scraper.

Hodge shall dance with Prue,
Keeping time with kisses;
We 'll have a jovial crew
Of sweet smirking misses.

WINTER.*

WILLIAM COWPER.

O WINTER, ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scattered hair with sleet like ashes filled,
Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapped in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way,
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art! Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering, at short notice, in one group,
The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee king of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know.

* From "The Task."

DIVISION VI.

CHRISTMAS VERSES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

FEW words will suffice by way of introduction to the Christmas Poems of the nineteenth century, as these, for the most part, treat of customs and peculiarities familiar to all. The picturesque ceremonies and rude festivities that distinguished the Christmas of bygone times have passed away, and, for ourselves, we can regard the loss of them without regret. We are too thankful to have lighted upon a more civilized age, and to have escaped all the troubles, dangers, and miseries with which the "good old times" were so thickly beset, to grieve overmuch for the loss of even the better part of them. We conceive that Queen Victoria can celebrate her Christmas with her accustomed gracious hospitality, without its being necessary for the Lord Chamberlain to assume the character, and perform all the absurdities, of a Lord of Misrule. And, although the office of poet-laureate has come to be regarded as inconsistent with the spirit of the present age, yet it was an advantageous change for the fooleries of a court-jester. We are well content, too, that the Christmas pantomime, and an occasional bal-masqué, should be the only existing remnants of the absurd Mummings of our ancestors. The Yule log and the Wassail bowl are beyond revival, and even the Christmas Carol is falling into desuetude. The practice of decking churches and houses with evergreens is, perhaps, the most honoured of all the old Christmas customs. The Boar's head has still a place in the Christmas banquet at one of our colleges, and at the mansions of some few of our nobility; yet, even this once favourite dish is very nigh displaced by the formidable baron of beef. It is at Queen's College, Oxford, that the Boar's head is brought, on Christmas day, to the high table in the Hall, while an altered version of the Old Carol printed by Wynkin de Worde, is chanted forth by a band of attendant choristers.

The following picturesque and oft-quoted description of Christmas in the olden time is from the introduction to the sixth canto of "Marmion."

CHRISTMAS IN THE OLDEN TIME.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

HEAP on more wood!—the wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We'll keep our Christmas merry still.
Each age has deemed the new-born year
The fittest time for festal cheer.
And well our Christian sires of old
Loved when the year its course had rolled,
And brought blithe Christmas back again,
With all his hospitable train.
Domestic and religious rite
Gave honour to the holy night:
On Christmas eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas eve the mass was sung;
That only night, in all the year,
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear.
The damsel donned her kirtle sheen;
The hall was dressed with holly green;
Forth to the wood did merry men go,
To gather in the mistletoe;
Then opened wide the baron's hall
To vassal, tenant, serf, and all;
Power laid his rod of rule aside,
And ceremony doffed his pride.
The heir, with roses in his shoes,
That night might village partner choose.

The lord, underogating, share
The vulgar game of "post and pair."
All hailed, with uncontrolled delight,
And general voice, the happy night,
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down.
The fire, with well-dried logs supplied,
Went roaring up the chimney wide;
The huge hall-table's oaken face,
Scrubbed till it shone, the day to grace,
Bore then upon its massive board
No mark to part the squire and lord.
Then was brought in the lusty brawn
By old blue-coated serving man;
Then the grim boar's head frowned on high,
Crested with bays and rosemary.
Well can the green-garbed ranger tell,
How, when, and where, the monster fell;

What dogs before his death he tore,
And all the baiting of the boar.
The wassail round, in good brown bowls,
Garnished with ribbons, blithly trowls.
There the huge sirloin reeked; hard by
Plum-porridge stood, and Christmas pie;
Nor failed old Scotland to produce,
At such high tide, her savoury goose.
Then came the merry masquers in,
And carols roared with blithsome din;
If unmelodious was the song,
It was a hearty note, and strong,
Who lists may in their mumming see
Traces of ancient mystery;
White shirts supplied the masquerade,
And smutted cheeks the visors made;
But, O! what masquers, richly dight,
Can boast of bosoms half so light!
England was merry England, when
Old Christmas brought his sports again.
'T was Christmas broached the mightiest ale;
'T was Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft could cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year.

WASSAIL.

(From "Ainsworth's Magazine," 1848.)

WASSAIL! wassail! Ye merry men, hail,
Who brightened the days of old;
What brave conceits, and humoursome feats,
Are sung of our fathers bold.
From morning chime, unto vesper time,
They revelled in careless glee,
And danced at night with spirits as light
As the notes of their minstrelsy.

Wassail! wassail! At the knight's regale
'Twas the signal for deep carouse,
Nor there alone, for the joyous tone
Shook many a priestly house;
The monks forgot their bachelor's lot,
Surrounded by goodly cheer,
And raised the cup, in its brim full up,
To the utter contempt of care.

Wassail! wassail! cried the yeoman hale,
As he shouldered his quarter-staff,
And homeward rode where the spiced ale stood
Awaiting his hearty quaff;
The cot meanwhile, lit up by the smile
Of a frank good-hearted mirth,
And free to all who might chance to call,
Was the happiest place on earth!

CHRISTMAS MINSTRELSY.

ADDRESSED TO THE REV. DR. WORDSWORTH.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

THE Minstrels played their Christmas tune
To-night beneath my cottage eaves;
While, smitten by a lofty moon,
The encircling laurels, thick with leaves,
Gave back a rich and dazzling sheen,
That overpowered their natural green.

Through hill and valley every breeze
Had sunk to rest with folded wings:
Keen was the air, but could not freeze,
Nor check the music of the strings;
So stout and hardy were the band
That scraped the chords with strenuous hand!

And who but listened?—till was paid
Respect to every inmate's claim:
The greeting given, the music played,
In honour of each household name,
Duly pronounced with lusty call,
And "merry Christmas" wished to all!

O brother! I revere the choice
That took thee from thy native hills;
And it is given thee to rejoice:
Though public care full often tills
(Heaven only witness of the toil)
A barren and ungrateful soil.

Yet, would that Thou, with me and mine,
Hadst heard this never-failing rite;
And seen on other faces shine
A true revival of the light,
Which Nature and these rustic powers,
In simple childhood, spread through ours!

For pleasure hath not ceased to wait
On these expected annual rounds;
Whether the rich man's sumptuous gate
Call forth the unelaborate sounds,
Or they are offered at the door
That guards the lowliest of the poor.

How touching, when, at midnight, sweep
Snow-muffled winds, and all is dark,
To hear—and sink again to sleep!
Or, at an earlier call, to mark,
By blazing fire, the still suspense
Of self-complacent innocence.

The mutual nod,—the grave disguise
Of hearts with gladness brimming o'er;
And some unbidden tears that rise
For names once heard, and heard no more;
Tears brightened by the serenade
For infant in the cradle laid.

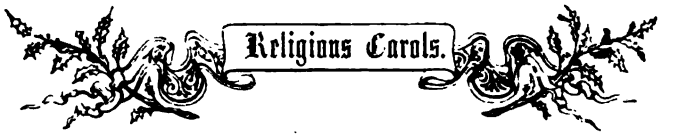
Ah! not for emerald fields alone,
With ambient streams more pure and bright
Than fabled Cytherea's zone
Glittering before the Thunderer's sight,
Is to my heart of hearts endeared
The ground where we were born and reared!

Hail, ancient Manners! sure defence,
Where they survive, of wholesome laws;
Remnants of love whose modest sense
Thus into narrow room withdraws;
Hail, Usages of pristine mould,
And ye that guard them, Mountains old!

Bear with me, Brother! quench the thought
That slights this passion, or condemns;
If thou fond Fancy ever brought
From the proud margin of the Thames,
And Lambeth's venerable towers,
To humbler streams and greener bowers.

Yes, they can make, who fail to find,
Short leisure even in busiest days;
Moments, to cast a look behind,
And profit by those kindly rays
That through the clouds do sometimes steal,
And all the far-off past reveal.

Hence, while the imperial City's din
Beats frequent on thy satiate ear,
A pleased attention I may win
To agitations less severe,
That neither overwhelm nor cloy,
But fill the hollow vale with joy!



A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

SAMUEL T. COLERIDGE.

The shepherds went their hasty way,
And found the lowly stable shed
Where the virgin mother lay:
And now they checked their eager tread,
For, to the babe that at her bosom clung,
A mother's song the virgin mother sung.

They told her how a glorious light,
Streaming from a heavenly throng,
Around them shone, suspending night!
While, sweeter than a mother's song,
Blest angels heralded the Saviour's birth,
Glory to God on high! and peace on earth.

She listened to the tale divine,
And closer still the babe she pressed:
And while she cried, the babe is mine!
The milk rushed faster to her breast:

Joy rose within her, like a summer's morn;
Peace, peace on earth! the Prince of Peace is born.

Thou mother of the Prince of Peace,
Poor, simple, and of low estate,
That strife should vanish, battle cease,
O why should this thy soul elate?
Sweet music's loudest note, the poet's story,—
Didst thou ne'er love to hear of fame and glory?

And is not war a youthful king,
A stately hero clad in mail?
Beneath his footsteps laurels spring;
Him earth's majestic monarchs hail
Their friend, their playmate! and his bold bright eye
Compels the maiden's love-confessing sigh.

"Tell this in some more courtly scene,
To maids and youths in robes of state!
I am a woman poor and mean,
And, therefore, is my soul elate.
War is a ruffian, all with guilt defiled,
That from the aged father tears his child!

"A murderous fiend, by fiends adored,
He kills the sire and starves the son;
The husband kills, and from her board
Steals all his widow's toil had won?
Plunders God's world of beauty; rends away
All safety from the night, all comfort from the day.

"Then wisely is my soul elate,
That strife should vanish, battle cease:

I 'm poor and of a low estate,
The mother of the Prince of Peace.
Joy rises in me, like a summer's morn:
Peace, peace on earth, the Prince of Peace is born."

CHRISTMAS CAROL.

FELICIA HEMANS.

O LOVELY voices of the sky,
That hymned the Saviour's birth!
Are ye not singing still on high,
Ye that sang, "Peace on earth?"
To us yet speak the strains,
Wherewith, in days gone by,
Ye blessed the Syrian swains,
O voices of the sky!

O clear and shining light, whose beams
That hour heaven's glory shed
Around the palms, and o'er the streams,
And on the shepherds' head;
Be near, through life and death,
As in that holiest night
Of Hope, and Joy, and Faith,
O clear and shining light!

O star which led to Him, whose love
Brought down man's ransom free;
Where art thou?—'midst the hosts above,
May we still gaze on thee?—

In heaven thou art not set,
Thy rays earth might not dim—
Send them to guide us yet!
O star which led to Him!

CHRISTMAS DAY.

SAMUEL RICKARDS.

Though rude winds usher thee, sweet day,
Though clouds thy face deform,
Though nature's grace is swept away
Before thy sleety storm;
E'en in thy sombrest wintry vest,
Of blessèd days thou art most blest.

Nor frigid air nor gloomy morn
Shall check our jubilee;
Bright is the day when Christ was born,
No sun need shine but He;
Let roughest storms their coldest blow,
With love of Him our hearts shall glow.

Inspired with high and holy thought,
Fancy is on the wing;
It seems as to mine ear it brought
Those voices carolling:
Voices through heaven and earth that ran,
Glory to God, good-will to man.

I see the shepherds gazing wild
At those fair spirits of light;

I see them bending o'er the child
With that untold delight,
Which marks the face of those who view
Things but too happy to be true.

There, in the lowly manger laid,
Incarnate God they see,
He stoops to take, through spotless maid,
Our frail humanity;
Son of high God, creation's Heir,
He leaves His heaven to raise us there.

Through Him, Lord, we are born anew,
Thy children once again,
Oh, day by day our hearts renew,
That Thine we may remain;
And angel-like, may all agree,
One sweet and holy family.

Oft as this joyous morn doth come
To speak our Saviour's love,
Oh, may it bear our spirits home
Where He now reigns above;
That day which brought Him from the skies,
So man restores to Paradise.

Then let winds usher thee, sweet day,
Let clouds thy face deform,
Though nature's grace is swept away
Before thy sleety storm;
E'en in thy sombrest wintry vest,
Of blessèd days thou art most blest.

THE NATIVITY.

W. J. BLEW.

NIGHT is set in, the stars their lamps are raising;
Each dewy flower hath closed its perfumed chalice;
O'er the blue hills the city lights are blazing,
And the gay cressets gleam in cot and palace.
Down the green sheep-tracks rest the flocks enfolden,
Round their still cotes the hinds their fires are waking,
While in the homes of Bethlehem lie holden
Eyes all unconscious of the mystery breaking.

Oh, wonder of all wonders,
The hinds their watch are keeping,
A babe is in the manger—
Christ Jesus there is sleeping;
The oxen round him lowing,
The ass his forehead bowing,
The maiden mother kneeling,
While night is o'er them stealing.

Soon shall a fire-flood kindle up the horizon,
Paling the night stars in their fairy shining,
Paling the broad sun at his first uprising,
Paling the bright moon at his red declining.
Hark, through the opened lattice of Heaven's portals
Soundeth—"To God be glory in the highest,
Peace be on earth; Good will to loving mortals."
Peace to thee, Christian, while with joy thou criest.

Oh, wonder of all wonders,
The hinds their watch are keeping,
A babe is in the manger—
Christ Jesus there is sleeping;

The oxen round him lowing,
The ass his forehead bowing,
The maiden mother kneeling,
While night is o'er them stealing.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

EDWARD MOXON.

NOW holier thoughts awake my rhyme,
The village bells with pealing chime;
And sweeter far their notes to me
Than those of loudest revelry.
To yonder heaven-pointing spire
Is bent the charitable Squire,

Where consecrated branches spread
Their weeping tendrils o'er the dead;
While there the elm and sable yew
Lend all their ruggedness to view,
Nor shield they now with leafy bloom
The villager's unsculptured tomb;
As when, with summer foliage crowned,
They hid from gaze each little mound.
Lo, where a goodly blooming train,
The maiden artless, and the swain;
They hear the summons from afar,
And gather where the holy are.
The aged sire there bends his way,
No staff his feeble arm to stay,
But *one* whose joy has been to share,
As now, thro' life his pious prayer.
They hie their tribute just to pay
To Him who lengthened has their day;
Within yon deeply shaded pile
Where meek Religion 's seen to smile,
As if the wayward to beguile;
While decked with modest evergreen
Her sanctuary may be seen;
A token sure of heavenly grace,
Befitting such a holy place.
The Squire upon his bended knee,
With all his family we see,
Gracing the velvet cushioned pew
With every meek observance due.
O may each humble heart now share
The Church's venerable prayer,
And may this day of all the year

The best and holiest appear:
And 'mid our deep affliction show
The bliss unmerited below,
Which Christ descended to bestow.

CHRISTMAS TIME.

JOHN CLARE.

Glad Christmas comes, and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now,
E'en want will dry its tears in mirth,
And crown him with a holly bough;
Though tramping 'neath a winter sky,
O'er snowy paths and rimy stiles,
The housewife sets her spinning by,
To bid him welcome with her smiles.

Each house is swept the day before,
And windows stuck with evergreens,
The snow is besomed from the door,
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes.
Gilt holly with its thorny pricks,
And yew, and box, with berries small,
These deck the unused candlesticks,
And pictures hanging by the wall.

Neighbours resume their annual cheer,
Wishing, with smiles and spirits high,
Glad Christmas and a happy year,
To every morning passer-by;

Milkmaids their Christmas journeys go,
Accompanied by a favoured swain;
And children pace the crumpling snow,
To taste their granny's cake again.

The shepherd now no more afraid,
Since custom doth the chance bestow,
Starts up to kiss the giggling maid,
Beneath the branch of mistletoe,
That 'neath each cottage beam is seen,
With pearl-like berries shining gay;
The shadow still of what hath been,
Which fashion yearly fades away,

The singing waits—a merry throng,
  At early morn, with simple skill,
Yet imitate the angel's song,
  And chaunt their Christmas ditty still;
And, 'mid the storm that dies and swells
  By fits, in hummings softly steals
The music of the village bells,
  Ringing around their merry peals.

When this is past, a merry crew,
  Bedecked in masks and ribbons gay,
The Morris Dance, their sports renew,
  And act their winter evening play.
The clown turned king, for penny praise,
  Storms with the actor's strut and swell,
And harlequin, a laugh to raise,
  Wears his hunch-back and tinkling bell.

And oft for pence and spicy ale,
  With winter nosegays pinned before,
The wassail-singer tells her tale,
  And drawls her Christmas carols o'er.
While 'prentice boy, with ruddy face,
  And rime-bepowdered dancing locks,
From door to door, with happy face,
  Runs round to claim his "Christmas-box."

The block upon the fire is put,
  To sanction custom's old desires,
And many a fagot's bands are cut
  For the old farmer's Christmas fires;
Where loud-tongued gladness joins the throng,
  And Winter meets the warmth of May,

Till, feeling soon the heat too strong,
He rubs his shins and draws away.

While snows the window-panes bedim,
The fire curls up a sunny charm,
Where, creaming o'er the pitcher's rim,
The flowering ale is set to warm.
Mirth, full of joy as summer bees,
Sits there its pleasures to impart,
And children, 'tween their parent's knees,
Sing scraps of carols off by heart.

And some, to view the winter weathers,
Climb up the window-seat with glee,
Likening the snow to falling feathers,
In fancy's infant ecstacy;
Laughing, with superstitious love,
O'er visions wild that youth supplies,
Of people pulling geese above,
And keeping Christmas in the skies.

As though the homestead trees were drest,
In lieu of snow, with dancing leaves,
As though the sun-dried martin's nest,
Instead of ic'cles hung the eaves;
The children hail the happy day—
As if the snow were April's grass,
And pleased, as 'neath the warmth of May,
Sport o'er the water froze to glass.

Thou day of happy sound and mirth,
That long with childish memory stays,

How blest around the cottage hearth,
I met thee in my younger days,
Harping, with rapture's dreaming joys,
On presents which thy coming found,
The welcome sight of little toys,
The Christmas gift of cousins round.

About the glowing hearth at night,
The harmless laugh and winter tale
Go round; while parting friends delight
To toast each other o'er their ale.
The cotter oft with quiet zeal
Will, musing, o'er his Bible lean;
While in the dark the lovers steal,
To kiss and toy behind the screen.

Old customs! Oh! I love the sound,
However simple they may be;
Whate'er with time hath sanction found,
Is welcome, and is dear to me,
Pride grows above simplicity,
And spurns them from her haughty mind:
And soon the poet's song will be
The only refuge they can find.

CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR.

THOMAS MILLER.

THOSE Christmas bells as sweetly chime,
As on the day when first they rung
So merrily in the olden time,
And far and wide their music flung:
Shaking the tall grey ivied tower,
With all their deep melodious power:
They still proclaim to every ear,
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

Then he came singing through the woods,
And plucked the holly bright and green;
Pulled here and there the ivy buds;
Was sometimes hidden, sometimes seen—
Half-buried 'neath the mistletoe,
His long beard hung with flakes of snow;
And still he ever carolled clear,
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

He merrily came in days of old,
When roads were few, and ways were foul,
Now staggered,—now some ditty trolled,
Now drank deep from his wassail bowl;
His holly silvered o'er with frost.
Nor never once his way he lost,
For reeling here and reeling there,
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

The hall was then with holly crowned,
'T was on the wild-deer's antlers placed:

It hemmed the battered armour round,
And every ancient trophy graced.
It decked the boar's head, tusked and grim,
The wassail bowl wreathed to the brim.
A summer-green hung everywhere,
For Christmas came but once a year.

His jaded steed the armèd knight
Reined up before the abbey gate;
By all assisted to alight,
From humble monk, to abbot great.

They placed his lance behind the door,
His armour on the rush-strewn floor;
And then brought out the best of cheer,
For Christmas came but once a year.

The maiden then, in quaint attire,
Loosed from her head the silken hood,
And danced before the yule-clog fire—
The crackling monarch of the wood.
Helmet and shield flashed back the blaze,
In lines of light, like summer rays,
While music sounded loud and clear;
For Christmas came but once a year.

What, though upon his hoary head,
Have fallen many a winter's snow,
His wreath is still as green and red
As 't was a thousand years ago.
For what has he to do with care?
His wassail bowl and old arm-chair
Are ever standing ready there,
For Christmas comes but once a year.

No marvel Christmas lives so long,
He never knew but merry hours,
His nights were spent with mirth and song,
In happy homes, and princely bowers;
Was greeted both by serf and lord,
And seated at the festal board;
While every voice cried "Welcome here,"
Old Christmas comes but once a year.

But what care we for days of old,
The knights whose arms have turned to rust,

Their grim boars' heads, and pasties cold,
Their castles crumbled into dust?
Never did sweeter faces go,
Blushing beneath the mistletoe,
Than are to-night assembled here,
For Christmas still comes once a year.

For those old times are dead and gone,
And those who hailed them passed away,
Yet still there lingers many a one,
To welcome in old Christmas Day.
The poor will many a care forget,
The debtor think not of his debt;
But, as they each enjoy their cheer,
Wish it was Christmas all the year.

And still around these good old times
We hang like friends full loth to part,
We listen to the simple rhymes
Which somehow sink into the heart,
"Half musical, half melancholy,"
Like childish smiles that still are holy
A masquer's face dimmed with a tear,
For Christmas comes but once a year.

The bells which usher in that morn,
Have ever drawn my mind away
To Bethlehëm, where Christ was born,
And the low stable where He lay,
In which the large-eyed oxen fed;
To Mary bowing low her head,
And looking down with love sincere,
Such thoughts bring Christmas once a year.

CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR.

At early day the youthful voice,
Heard singing on from door to door,
Makes the responding heart rejoice,
To know the children of the poor
For once are happy all day long;
We smile and listen to the song,
The burthen still remote or near,
"Old Christmas comes but once a year."

Upon a gayer happier scene,
Never did holly berries peer,
Or ivy throw its trailing green,
On brighter forms than there are here,
Nor Christmas in his old arm-chair
Smile upon lips and brows more fair,
Then let us sing amid our cheer,
Old Christmas still comes once a year.

CHRISTMAS TIDE.

ELIZA COOK.

When the merry spring-time weaves
Its peeping bloom and dewy leaves;
When the primrose opes its eye,
And the young moth flutters by;
When the plaintive turtle-dove
Pours its notes of peace and love;
And the clear sun flings its glory bright and wide—
Yet my soul will own
More joy in winter's frown,
And wake with warmer flush at Christmas tide.

The summer beams may shine
On the rich and curling vine,
And the noontide rays light up
The tulip's dazzling cup;
But the pearly mistletoe,
And the holly berries' glow,
Are not even by the boasted rose outvied;
For the happy hearts beneath
The green and coral wreath
Love the garlands that are twined at Christmas tide.

Let the autumn days produce
Yellow corn and purple juice,
And Nature's feast be spread
In the fruitage ripe and red;
'T is grateful to behold
Gushing grapes, and fields of gold,
When cheeks are browned, and red lips deeper dyed;
But give, oh! give to me,
The winter night of glee,
The mirth and plenty seen at Christmas tide.

The northern gust may howl,
The rolling storm-cloud scowl,
King Frost may make a slave
Of the river's rapid wave;
The snow-drift choke the path
Or the hail-shower spend its wrath,
But the sternest blast right bravely is defied,
While limbs and spirits bound
To the merry minstrel sound,
And social wood-fires blaze at Christmas tide.

The song, the laugh, the shout,
Shall mock the storm without;
And sparkling wine-foam rise
'Neath still more sparkling eyes;
The forms that scarcely meet
Then hand to hand shall greet,
And soul pledge soul that leagues too long divide.
Mirth, friendship, love, and light,
Shall crown the winter night,
And every glad voice welcome Christmas tide.

But while joy's echo falls
In gay and plenteous halls,
Let the poor and lowly share
The warmth, the sports, the fare;
For the one of humble lot
Must not shiver in his cot,
But claim a bounteous meed from wealth and pride.
Shed kindly blessings round.
Till no aching heart be found,
And then all hail to merry Christmas tide!

THE MAHOGANY TREE.

W. M. THACKERAY.

CHRISTMAS is here;
Winds whistle shrill,
Icy and chill:
Little care we.
Little we fear
Weather without,
Sheltered about
The Mahogany Tree.

Commoner greens,
Ivy and oaks,
Poets, in jokes,
Sing, do ye see:
Good fellows' shins
Here, boys, are found,
Twisting around
The Mahogany Tree.

Once on the boughs
Birds of rare plume
Sang, in its bloom;
Night-birds are we:
Here we carouse,
Singing, like them,
Perched round the stem
Of the jolly old tree.

Here let us sport,
Boys, as we sit;
Laughter and wit
Flashing so free.
Life is but short—
When we are gone,
Let them sing on,
Round the old tree.

Evenings we knew,
Happy as this;
Faces we miss,
Pleasant to see.
Kind hearts and true,
Gentle and just,
Peace to your dust!
We sing round the tree.

Care, like a dun,
Lurks at the gate:
Let the dog wait;
Happy we 'll be!
Drink every one;
Pile up the coals,
Fill the red bowls,
Round the old tree!

Drain we the cup.—
Friend, art afraid?
Spirits are laid
In the Red Sea.
Mantle it up;
Empty it yet;
Let us forget,
Round the old tree.

Sorrows, begone!
Life and its ills,
Duns and their bills,
Bid we to flee.
Come with the dawn,
Blue-devil sprite,
Leave us to night,
Round the old tree.

CHRISTMAS IS COME.

ALBERT SMITH.

THE old north breeze through the skeleton trees
Is chanting the year out drearily;
But loud let it blow, for at home we know
That the dry logs crackle cheerily;
And the frozen ground is in fetters bound;
But pile up the wood, we can burn it;
For Christmas is come, and in every home
To summer our hearts can turn it.
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, abroad and at home;
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, for Christmas is come.

And far and near, o'er landscape drear,
From casements brightly streaming,
With cheerful glow on the fallen snow
The ruddy light is gleaming;
The wind may shout as it likes without,
It may bluster, but never can harm us;
For a merrier din shall resound within,
And our Christmas feelings warm us.
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, abroad and at home;
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, for Christmas is come.

The flowers are torpid in their beds,
Till spring's first sunbeam sleeping;
Not e'en the snowdrops' pointed heads
Above the earth are peeping;

But groves remain on each frosted pane
Of feathery trees and bowers;
And fairer far we 'll maintain they are
Than summer's gaudiest flowers.
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, abroad and at home;
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, for Christmas is come.

Let us drink to those eyes we most dearly prize,
We can show how we love them after;
The fire blaze cleaves to the bright holly leaves,
And the mistletoe hangs from the rafter;
We care not for fruit, whilst we here can see
Their scarlet and pearly berries;
For the girls' soft cheeks shall our peaches be,
And their pouting lips our cherries.
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, abroad and at home;
Wassail! wassail!
Here 's happiness to all, for Christmas is come.

OLD CHRISTMAS.

J. BRIDGEMAN.

ONCE more the rapid, fleeting year
Has brought old Christmas to the door;
Come, let us treat him with such cheer
As folks were wont in days of yore,
When burgher grave, and belted knight,

And cottage maid, and lady fair,
Obeyed the old familiar sprite,
And, at his bidding, banished Care—
That sullen, surly, melancholy wight.

Let 's hang from beams all black with time,
The mistletoe's insidious bough,
'Neath which, as little birds with lime,
Young girls are snared, " they know not how—
The horrid thing—they never thought
It half so near—for if they had,
'T is certain they had not been caught—

On that rely—it was too bad,
And not at all behaving as one ought."

Upon the hearth pile up the fire,
And, that it may burn clear and bright,
Cast in it every base desire,
All envy, hatred, vengeance, spite;
Believe me, the event will show
By acting in this way you 'll gain—
For you will feel a genial glow
Dance through each gladly-swelling vein,
And onwards to your very heart's core go.

Bring, too, the sparkling wassail bowl,
That jolly Christmas holds so dear,
And if you'd have it warm your soul—
The mind as well as body cheer—
Amid the wine and spirit pour
The blessings from some humble roof;
A little charity is sure
To call them forth: in sober truth,
They'll give the draught one matchless flavour more.

And you, fair Sovereign of this isle,
Who love to deck the Christmas tree,
So that the massy, regal pile
Resound with mirth and jollity,
Remember that the stem with new
Strength thrives, if pruned with careful hand;
Then trim your Christmas sapling, too,
And to the poor throughout the land
Send of the shoots thus lopped away a few.

Winter.

A WRINKLED, crabbed man they picture thee,
Old Winter, with a rugged beard as grey
As the long moss upon the apple tree;
Blue lipt, an ice-drop at thy sharp blue nose;
Close muffled up, and on thy dreary way,
Plodding alone through sleet and drifting snows.
They should have drawn thee by the high-heapt hearth,
Old Winter! seated in thy great armed chair,
Watching the children at their Christmas mirth,
Or circled by them, as thy lips declare
Some merry jest, or tale of murder dire,
Or troubled spirit that disturbs the night,
Pausing at times to rouse the mouldering fire,
Or taste the old October brown and bright.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

DEAR boy, throw that icicle down,
And sweep this deep snow from the door;
Old Winter comes on with a frown—
A terrible frown for the poor.
In a season so rude and forlorn,
How can age, how can infancy, bear
The silent neglect and the scorn
Of those who have plenty to spare!

Fresh broached is my cask of old ale,
    Well timed now the frost is set in;
Here 's Job come to tell us a tale,
    We 'll make him at home to a pin.
While my wife and I bask o'er the fire,
    The roll of the seasons will prove,
That time may diminish desire,
    But cannot extinguish true love.

O the pleasures of neighbourly chat,
    If you can but keep scandal away!
To learn what the world has been at,
    And what the great orators say;
Though the wind through the crevices sing,
    And hail down the chimney rebound;
I 'm happier than many a king,
    While the bellows blow bass to the sound.

Abundance was never my lot:
    But out of the trifle that 's giv'n,
That no curse may alight on my cot,
    I 'll distribute the bounty of Heav'n.
The fool and the slave gather wealth;
    But if I add nought to my store,
Yet, while I keep conscience in health,
    I 've a mine that will never grow poor.

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD.

THERE 'S not a flower upon the hill,
    There 's not a leaf upon the tree;
The summer bird hath left its bough,
Bright child of sunshine, singing now
    In spicy lands beyond the sea.

There 's silence in the harvest field;
And blackness in the mountain glen,
And cloud that will not pass away
From the hill tops for many a day;
And stillness round the homes of men.

The old tree hath an older look;
The lonesome place is yet more dreary;
They go not now, the young and old,
Slow wandering on by wood and wold;
The air is damp, the winds are cold,
And summer paths are wet and weary.

The drooping year is in the wane,
No longer floats the thistle down;
The crimson heath is wan and sere;
The sedge hangs withering by the mere,
And the broad fern is rent and brown.

The owl sits huddling by himself,
The cold has pierced his body thorough;
The patient cattle hang their head;
The deer are 'neath their winter shed;
The ruddy squirrel 's in his bed,
And each small thing within its burrow.

In rich men's halls the fire is piled,
And ermine robes keep out the weather;
In poor men's huts the fire is low,
Through broken panes the keen winds blow,
And old and young are cold together.

Oh, poverty is disconsolate!—
Its pains are many, its foes are strong:
The rich man in his jovial cheer,
Wishes 't was winter through the year;
The poor man, 'mid his wants profound,
With all his little children round,
Prays God that winter be not long!

One silent night hath passed, and lo!
How beautiful the earth is now!
All aspect of decay is gone,
The hills have put their vesture on,
And clothèd is the forest bough.

Say not 't is an unlovely time!
Turn to the wide, white waste thy view;
Turn to the silent hills that rise
In their cold beauty to the skies;
And to those skies intensely blue.

Silent, not sad, the scene appeareth;
And fancy, like a vagrant breeze,

Ready a-wing for flight, doth go
To the cold northern land of snow,
Beyond the icy Orcades,

The land of ice, the land of snow,
The land that hath no summer flowers
Where never living creature stood—
The wild, dim, polar solitude:
How different from this land of ours!

Walk now among the forest trees,—
Said'st thou that they were stripped and bare?
Each heavy bough is bending down
With snowy leaves and flowers—the crown
Which Winter regally doth wear.

'T is well—thy summer garden ne'er
Was lovelier with its birds and flowers,
Than is this silent place of snow,
With feathery branches drooping low,
Wreathing around thee, shadowy bowers!

MARY HOWITT.

This is now the winter time,
My merry gentlemen,
Yule logs are burning in your hall,
Fair forms are circling in the ball,
And cups are filled with purple wine
To aid the pudding and the chine.
This is now the winter time;
Remember, gentles, then,
That none shall starve while you shall dine;
That none shall thirst who grow the vine.
Yet give no alms in mean award,
But spread the just, the well-earned board.

WINTER.

This is now the winter time,
My noble gentlemen.

This is now the winter time,
My reverend clergymen;
Christ came to save in winter time,
And not in summer's sultry prime:
And He your pattern sure must be,
When glows with red the holly tree.
This is now the winter time,
Remember, clerks all, then,
That Christ in winter came to save
Not only souls, but bodies brave.
The bread His body, and the wine
His blood. Then spread the feast divine;
This is now the winter time,
My Christian clergymen.

This is now the winter time,
My honest working men,
"Weave truth with trust," ye weavers, then
And "draw straight furrows," farming men,
And with good grace and no hard knocks—
Take justice for a Christmas box.
This is now the winter time,
Remember, workers, then,
That none should starve while others have.
That Christ in winter came to save,
And, but in no alms-taking way,
Accept your rights on New Year's day.
This is now the winter time,
My gallant working men.

GOODWYN BARMBY.

CHURCH DECKING AT CHRISTMAS.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

WOULD that our scrupulous sires had dared to leave
Less scanty measure of those graceful rites
And usages, whose due return invites
A stir of mind too natural to deceive;
Giving the memory help when she could weave
A crown for Hope!—I dread the boasted lights
That all too often are but fiery blights,
Killing the bud o'er which in vain we grieve.
Go, seek, when Christmas snows discomfort bring,
The counter Spirit found in some gay church
Green with fresh holly, every pew a perch
In which the linnet or the thrush might sing,
Merry and loud, and safe from prying search,
Strains offered only to the genial spring.

THE HOLLY TREE.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

O READER! hast thou ever stood to see
The holly tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,
Ordered by an intelligence so wise,
As might confound the atheist's sophistries.

Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen,
Wrinkled and keen;
No grazing cattle, through their prickly round,
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarmed the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize:
And in this wisdom of the holly tree
Can emblems see,
Wherewith, perchance, to make a pleasant rhyme,
One which may profit in the after time.

Thus, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the holly tree.

And should my youth, as youth is apt, I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,

Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the holly tree.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The holly leaves a sombre hue display,
Less bright than they;
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the holly tree?

So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the holly tree.

UNDER THE HOLLY BOUGH.

CHARLES MACKAY.

Ye who have scorned each other,
Or injured friend or brother,
In this fast fading year;
Ye who, by word or deed,
Have made a kind heart bleed,
Come gather here.
Let sinned against, and sinning,
Forget their strife's beginning,
And join in friendship now:
Be links no longer broken,
Be sweet forgiveness spoken,
Under the Holly Bough.

Ye who have loved each other,
Sister and friend and brother,
In this fast fading year:
Mother and sire and child,
Young man and maiden mild,
Come gather here;
And let your hearts grow fonder,
As memory shall ponder
Each past unbroken vow.
Old loves and younger wooing
Are sweet in the renewing,
Under the Holly Bough.

Ye who have nourished sadness,
Estranged from hope and gladness,
In this fast fading year;
Ye, with o'erburdened mind,
Made aliens from your kind,
Come gather here.
Let not the useless sorrow
Pursue you night and morrow.
If e'er you hoped, hope now—
Take heart;—uncloud your faces,
And join in our embraces,
Under the Holly Bough.

THE HOLLY BERRY.

THOMAS MILLER.

Gone are the summer hours,
The birds have left their bowers;
While the holly true retains his hue,
Nor changes like the flowers.

On his armèd leaf reposes
The berries tinged like roses;
For he 's ever seen in red and green,
While grim old Winter dozes.

hen drink to the holly berry,
With hey down, hey down derry;
The mistletoe we 'll pledge also,
And at Christmas all be merry.

Above all cold affections,
Like pleasant recollections,
The ivy grows, and a deep veil throws
O'er all Time's imperfections;
The mould'ring column screening,
The naked gateway greening,
While the falling shrine it doth entwine
Like a heart that 's homeward leaning.
Then drink, &c.

We read in ancient story,
How the Druids in their glory
Marched forth of old, with hooks of gold,
To forests dim and hoary;
The giant oak ascended,
Then from its branches rended
The mistletoe, long long ago,
By maidens fair attended.
Then drink, &c.

Each thorpe and grange surrounding,
The waits to music bounding,
Aroused the cook, that her fire might smoke
Ere the early cock was sounding.

For all the land was merry,
And rang with "Hey down derry,"
While in castle hall, and cottage small,
There glittered the holly berry.
Then drink, &c.

THE CHRISTMAS HOLLY.

ELIZA COOK.

The holly! the holly! oh, twine it with bay—
Come give the holly a song;
For it helps to drive stern winter away,
With his garment so sombre and long;
It peeps through the trees with its berries of red,
And its leaves of burnished green,
When the flowers and fruits have long been dead,
And not even the daisy is seen.
Then sing to the holly, the Christmas holly,
That hangs over peasant and king;
While we laugh and carouse 'neath its glitt'ring boughs,
To the Christmas holly we 'll sing.

The gale may whistle, the frost may come
To fetter the gurgling rill;
The woods may be bare, and warblers dumb,
But holly is beautiful still.
In the revel and light of princely halls
The bright holly branch is found;
And its shadow falls on the lowliest walls,
While the brimming horn goes round.
Then drink to the holly, &c.

The ivy lives long, but its home must be
Where graves and ruins are spread:
There 's beauty about the cypress tree,
But it flourishes near the dead;
The laurel the warrior's brow may wreathe,
But it tells of tears and blood;
I sing the holly, and who can breathe
Aught of that that is not good?
Then sing to the holly, &c.

THE MISTLETOE.

(From "Fraser's Magazine," 1835.)

Of all the nights within the year,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
That 's the night to lovers dear,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
When blushing lips, that smile at folly,
As red as berries on the holly,
Kiss, and banish melancholy.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Ice was glittering on the farm,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Woman's heart was beating warm,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
And woman's eyes, when frost is near,
And chilly drooping snows appear,
Can make the sunny time of year.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Roger Rood the fiddle played,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Mary at his elbow stayed,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
And, oh! we saw by each fond look,
And how his trembling quavers shook,
Her beauty was his music book.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Much he tuned and much he sung,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Mary still about him hung,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Till, taking courage, he advanced,
And struck a jig; then how we danced!
But Mary for his partner chanced.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Mary tripped with panting breath,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Till the magic bough beneath,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Then she feigned undone her shoe,
But the swain her mischief knew,
And seized a kiss—it might be two.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

Then the kissing time begun,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
Men looked shy, and lasses fun,
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!
But honest men, whom girls believe,
Throughout the year would sigh and grieve,
Did they not kiss on Christmas-eve.
Oh, oh, the mistletoe!

THE MISTLETOE.

BARRY CORNWALL.

When winter nights grow long,
And winds without blow cold,
We sit in a ring round the warm wood fire,
And listen to stories old!
And we try to look grave (as maids should be),
When the men bring in boughs of the laurel tree.
O, the laurel, the evergreen tree,
The poets have laurels, and why not we?

How pleasant, when night falls down,
And hides the wintry sun,
To see them come in to the blazing fire,
And know that their work is done;
Whilst many bring in, with a laugh or rhyme,
Green branches of holly for Christmas time.
O, the holly, the bright green holly!
It tells (like a tongue) that the times are jolly!

Sometimes—(in *our* grave house
Observe, this happeneth not;)
But at times the evergreen laurel boughs,
And the holly are all forgot,
And then—what then? why, the men laugh low,
And hang up a branch of——the mistletoe!
Oh, brave is the laurel! and brave is the holly,
But the mistletoe banisheth melancholy!
Ah, nobody knows, nor ever *shall* know,
What is done under the mistletoe.

CHURCH BELLS.

JOHN KEBLE.

WAKE me to night, my mother dear,
That I may hear
The Christmas Bells, so soft and clear,
To high and low glad tidings tell,
How God the Father loved us well,

How God the Eternal Son
Came to undo what we had done,
How God the Paraclete,
Who in the chaste womb formed the Babe so sweet,
In power and glory came, the birth to aid and greet.

Wake me, that I the twelvemonth long
May bear the song
About with me in the world's throng;
That treasured joys of Christmas tide
May with mine hour of gloom abide;
The Christmas Carol ring
Deep in my heart, when I would sing;
Each of the twelve good days
Its earnest yield of duteous love and praise,
Ensuring happy months, and hallowing common ways.

Wake me again, my mother dear,
That I may hear
The peal of the departing year.
O well I love, the step of Time
Should move to that familiar chime:
Fair fall the tones that steep
The Old Year in the dews of sleep,
The New guide softly in
With hopes to sweet sad memories akin!
Long may that soothing cadence ear, heart, conscience win.

DIRGE FOR THE YEAR.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

ORPHAN hours, the year is dead,
Come and sigh, come and weep!
Merry hours smile instead,
For the year is but asleep.
See, it smiles as it is sleeping,
Mocking your untimely weeping.

As an earthquake rocks a corse
In its coffin in the clay,
So White Winter, that rough nurse,
Rocks the death-cold year to-day;
Solemn hours! wait aloud
For your mother in her shroud.

As the wild air stirs and sways
The tree-swung cradle of a child,
So the breath of these rude days
Rocks the year:—be calm and mild,
Trembling hours, she will arise
With new love within her eyes.

January gray is here,
Like a sexton by her grave;
February bears the bier,
March with grief doth howl and rave,
And April weeps—but, O, ye hours,
Follow with May's fairest flowers.

THE DEATH OF THE OLD YEAR.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

FULL knee-deep lies the winter snow,
And the winter winds are wearily sighing:
Toll ye the church-bell sad and slow,
And tread softly, and speak low,
For the Old year lies a-dying.
Old year, you must not die;
You came to us so readily,
You lived with us so steadily,
Old year, you shall not die.

He lieth still: he doth not move:
He will not see the dawn of day.
He hath no other life above.
He gave me a friend, and a true, true love,
And the New year will take 'em away.
Old year, you must not go;
So long as you have been with us
Such joy as you have seen with us
Old year, you shall not go.

He frothed his bumpers to the brim;
A jollier year we shall not see.
But though his eyes are waxing dim,
And though his foes speak ill of him,
He was a friend to me.
Old year, you shall not die;
We did so laugh and cry with you.
I've half a mind to die with you,
Old year, if you must die.

He was full of joke and jest,
But all his merry quips are o'er.
To see him die, across the waste
His son and heir doth ride post-haste,
But he'll be dead before.
Every one for his own.
The night is starry and cold, my friend,
And the New year blithe and bold, my friend,
Comes up to take his own.

How hard he breathes! over the snow
I heard just now the crowing cock.

The shadows flicker to and fro:
The cricket chirps: the light burns low:
'T is nearly twelve o'clock.
Shake hands, before you die.
Old Year, we'll dearly rue for you:
What is it we can do for you?
Speak out before you die.

His face is growing sharp and thin.
Alack! our friend is gone.
Close up his eyes: tie up his chin:
Step from the corpse, and let him in
That standeth there alone,
And waiteth at the door.
There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
And a new face at the door, my friend,
A new face at the door.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

While the bald trees stretch forth their long lank arms,
And starving birds peck nigh the reeky farms:
While houseless cattle paw the yellow field,
Or coughing shiver in the pervious bield,
And nought more gladsome in the hedge is seen,
Than the dark holly's grimly glistening green—
At such a time, the ancient year goes by
To join its parents in eternity—
At such a time the merry year is born,
Like the bright berry from the naked thorn.

The bells ring out; the hoary steeple rocks—
Hark! the long story of a score of clocks;
For, once a year, the village clocks agree,
E'en clocks unite to sound the hour of glee—
And every cottage has a light awake,
Unusual stars long flicker o'er the lake.
The moon on high, if any moon be there,
May peep, or wink, no mortal now will care,
For 't is the season, when the nights are long,
There's time, e'er morn, for each to sing his song.

The year departs, a blessing on its head,
We mourn not for it, for it is not dead:
Dead? What is that? A word to joy unknown,
Which love abhors, and faith will never own.
A word, whose meaning sense could never find,
That has no truth in matter, nor in mind.
The passing breezes gone as soon as felt,
The flakes of snow that in the soft air melt,
The wave that whitening curls its frothy crest,
And falls to sleep upon its mother's breast.
The smile that sinks into a maiden's eye,
They come, they go, they change, they do not die.
So the Old year—that fond and formal name,
Is with us yet, another and the same.

And are the thoughts, that ever more are fleeing,
The moments that make up our being's being,
The silent workings of unconscious love,
Or the dull hate which clings and will not move,
In the dark caverns of the gloomy heart,
The fancies wild and horrible, which start

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

RING out wild bells to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY HENRY VIZETELLY,
AT GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET STREET.
DECEMBER, MDCCCLI.